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THROUGH MEXICO ON HORSEBACK



EAST MEETS WEST...AT THE STABLES

Through
MEXICO
on Horseback

FORTY DAYS *and*
NIGHTS *in the*
WILDERNESS
of OLD MEXICO

By
JOSEPH CARL GOODWIN



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A Mi Maestro

JAMES SAXON CHILDERS

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J. C. G.

PREFACE

Tokyo, Japan, June 10, 1933.

Two years ago, today, an expedition was launched. Jake, "the Yankee with an itching foot," and I, "a diplomat with a supercilious grin," were conveyed to the western edge of the city of St. Louis, Mo., in a shiny sedan. The Girl was at the wheel. A five-ounce bottle of "government" alcohol was substituted at the launching ceremony.

Thus was the pain of parting made less acute. And thus began adventure. School was out. Jake and I were en route to a land of romance. We were hitch-hiking to the Mexican border where we planned to buy horses for a trip through Old Mexico.

Many had advised us against the undertaking. When we left our classes we knew that our pictures and obituaries were on file in the "morgue" of The Columbia Missourian, laboratory newspaper of the University of Missouri School of Journalism. The tragic death of two Mexican youths at Ardmore, Okla., had given strength to friends' prophecies of multiple dangers.

But we could not resist the lure of places we had not seen. We traveled through Mexico on horseback. And dangers were as welcome—and far more satisfying—than pleasures.

PREFACE

Two years have passed since the shiny sedan turned back toward St. Louis, leaving a Japanese and a Gringo standing beside Manchester Road, extended thumbs gesturing at passing motorists and eyes turned to the setting sun. Two years are as so many hours in the realm of memory.

ROBERT Y. HORIZUCHI.

*Tokyo, Japan,
June 10, 1933.*

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Buying Horses in Villa Acuña Is Like Buying Automobiles in Cities of the United States.

CHAPTER I

BUYING horses in Villa Acuña is like buying automobiles in cities of the United States. You merely voice your intentions and await developments. Five minutes after you have spoken of the matter the first salesman arrives. After that, hide where you may, horse owners will hunt you down until you have bought.

Bob Horiguchi and I crossed into Mexico one afternoon just in time to register our arrival before the immigration office closed at three o'clock. By nightfall we had turned down a dozen proffered mounts, including two mules, and had been advised to "see Issac C. (Carranza) Castellano before you buy."

Bob and I mainly were interested in studying Mexico through the eyes of its people. And horses, we decided, formed the most practical conveyance for drifting through the country from border to capital, living with the natives, learning their habits and sharing their daily activities.

While attending school in Missouri, we heard a former resident of El Paso, Texas, say: "Passing through northern Mexico on horseback is the same thing as taking ground glass or carbolic acid; it is just another method of suicide." That probably was the real reason

for our being in Villa Acuña late in June of 1931, buying horses for a journey to the City of Mexico, a thousand miles to the south.

Bob, whose name is Robert Yoshinori Horiguchi, is a citizen of Japan. He was born in Sweden, of a Belgian mother and a Japanese father. He was a small child in Mexico during the Madero revolution, and the story is told that five bullets splintered the head of his bed as he lay asleep in the Nipponese legation at the capital city.

His father was in the diplomatic service.

Before Bob was five years old he had been whisked away to Spain. There he attended school four years. Then he went to live with his grandparents in Brussels. The World War forced him to leave Belgium while he still was a small boy.

Since then he has resided with his parents in Brazil, attended preparatory school at Eton, studied law in Tokyo and worked as a newspaper correspondent during the bandit raids on the South Manchurian Railroad in 1928.

When I met him he was studying journalism at the University of Missouri. He was only twenty-two years old when we entered Mexico and began bickering for horses.

I was twenty, Irish-American, a Mississippian by birth, an Alabamian by adoption and a wanderer by preference. I had followed the wheat harvest, packed peas in Seattle, repaired automobiles, shoveled coal, punched cattle in Texas, edited a weekly newspaper, finished college in Birmingham; and just returned from a ten thousand mile hitch-hiking trip over the western

states and the Mexican and Canadian borders, when I enrolled at Missouri.

I did not like Bob Horiguchi. I called him "The Yellow Peril." His English was too finished, his smile too bland and his words too carefully diplomatic. Moreover, he dressed in excellent taste.

The feeling probably was mutual. He called me "Mick." I wore boots to class. Often I smelled of horses.

He was a ranking copyreader and I thought I was one of the better reporters. That did not increase our admiration for each other.

Our incorporation occurred in the newsroom of *The Columbia Missourian*. I was standing at the city desk, talking to John R. Whittaker. He has relatives in Southwest Texas, and once worked in El Paso and Juarez. Having a common admiration for the Lone Star State, we frequently discussed it together.

"What are you planning to do when school is out?" Mr. Whittaker asked.

"I think I'll buy a horse at the border and take a trip down through Mexico," I answered. The idea had clung to a remote corner of my consciousness for months.

"The hell you are! Say, those Yaquis are dangerous. They will knife you and take your horse before you have gone a hundred miles."

"Do you know anything at all about the country?"

"Well, I know a few of the border towns," I was answering him, when I noticed that Bob Horiguchi,

cravat neatly knotted and a white handkerchief showing in one cuff, was listening to our conversation.

He looked at me from his cloud-wreathed pinnacle and asked, very precisely and very dubiously, "Are you really going to do that?"

Instantly I knew that was just what I was going to do. "Yeah," I countered, and a belligerent vein swelled in my throat.

"Would you like a companion?"

"Who?"

"Why, I would like to go, if you have no objections. I have ridden a bit in China. I speak some Spanish. If you think you can put up with me, I will appreciate your kindness." And he smiled that radiant, diplomatic smile that completely baffled, and seemingly hypnotized, Mexican officials as we traveled southward.

"Sure," I answered. "You can go. It'll be better with two of us. I'm leaving soon as school is out."

"Splendid. Have dinner with me tonight and we will form our plans."

We had dinner at Givan's. We talked until they ran us out, to close shop.

Later we wrote to several newspapers and asked if they would be interested in stories we might gather en route. Three responded favorably.

On the afternoon of June 10, our extra clothing expressed ahead, Bob Horiguchi and I stood at the edge of a highway, near the outskirts of St. Louis. We were waiting for the first obliging motorist, who was destined to launch a nine hundred mile "thumb tour" to the border.

Twelve days later we were in Villa Acuña, after stopping three days at the ranch of an uncle at McLean, Texas, and three days at the ranch of a friend at Ozona. During those stops, we rode every day, to condition ourselves for the longer trip to the Mexican capital.

Señor Raymundo Rivera welcomed us into Mexico. We met him through a mutual acquaintance in Del Rio, Texas. He guided us past the X-ray-eyed *aduanos*, customs officials. He gained permission for us to carry a typewriter and a camera. He unwound great spools of the legislative tape binding the hands of government employes.

He changed our American dollars into pesos and, because he profited one dollar and fifty cents on the exchange, he seemed to feel obligated to do us a thousand favors.

He introduced us to the dignitaries. He directed us through the then-building radio station XER, sound temple of and to the Kansas goat gland specialist, Dr. Robert Brinkley. He obtained special rates for us at the hotel and the store where we went to buy our supplies. He made us acquainted with Wili, the young German at the Sabinas bar. And, by far most important, he gave us a letter of introduction to "Carranza" Castellano, him who, after many others had been turned away, was to sell us horses.

In an open car with innumerable rattles and a lunatic driver, we rode twenty miles to buy horses from Carranza. The machine arrived at eight in the morning,

and two hours elapsed before we reached the customs ranch managed by Señor Castellano.

During those two hours we were jostled through thickets of cactus and thorn, thrown across dry arroyos, and jerked into and out of gaping canyons that led away northward to the Río Grande. Often we skirted the rocky brink of the river, itself, and looked down at the muddy, yellow stream.

Yesterday, the driver told us with a smirk, the women of the village had bathed naked in the river. Yesterday was St. John's Day, and all the men had gathered along the banks to see.

Today the river was silent and lifeless. Jagged, gray stones protruded from its sullen depths. Across on the American side the cliffs were topped with sage and chaparral.

This we saw as in a kaleidoscope, while we were tossed in rapid rotations between the seat and the top of the car. Through it all, our driver clung to the wheel and kept up an incessant staccato of verbal duds that arrived with a rush of sound but contained not a single grain of the good black powder of thought.

Carranza Castellano met us. He was a romantic appearing person, darkly handsome, constructed like an all-American fullback. He wore a wide-brimmed service hat and a khaki uniform. A forty-five caliber automatic pistol hung low on his right thigh. His lower legs were encased in leather puttees that covered the tops of high-heeled *zapatos*. There was a brightly colored kerchief about his neck, and he smiled with a broad, friendly opening of strong lips that revealed white teeth.

designed for holding a rose tossed by some admiring señorita—or, just as engagingly, sinking into the throat of an enemy.

He was riding a gaunt, red mule which, he assured us proudly, was more than twenty years old.

Carranza glanced a moment at the letter from Señor Rivera. Had he horses? He had, both Americano and Mexicano. He called his men. A dozen ragged Indians, dressed partly as soldiers and partly as vaqueros, appeared from mud and thatch huts, laid their rifles aside and donned spurs, to go round up *los caballos*.

The muzzles of their rifles were stopped with wooden pegs to keep out rain and dust. Their spurs and ropes were shiny and well-worn. Our driver joined the *soldados*, and we waited in the car for their return.

Rising clouds of dust, from which issued a half-wild herd of horses, announced them. Amid savage shouts, swinging of lariats, curses, wild laughs, short dashes and sudden stops on their own mounts, the Indian soldier-vaqueros drove the herd into a patchwork corral.

Still riding his ancient mule, but with a vigor and gusto that completely exceeded like efforts of his underlings, Carranza slid to a halt before us. Perspiration gleamed across his brow and a grin transformed his entire face. I listened in vain for the grind of news-reel cameras. We walked to the corral and climbed to the fence top, above the milling animals.

A big black with a wild look in his eyes seemed to lead the band. Bob obviously was fascinated. "That one," he asked, "will you sell him?"

There was a faint smile hiding around the corners of

Carranza's eyes. I tried to appear disinterested. I had traded for horses before.

"Sure," said Carranza. "But I like that horse very much. He American horse, very strong. He worth lots of money." He paused and glanced sidewise at Bob. "One hundred and fifty pesos I want for that horse."

Bob's disappointment was apparent.

Carranza called to one of his men. "Pedro, this big one, Negra." Pedro's rope lashed out and the mighty Negra was fighting on the end of it. Another rope whirled once in the air and Negra was struggling on the ground.

The echo from his fall mingled with the thud of a saddle on his broad back. Carranza began wheeling him about the corral. For many days he had been free on the range. He reared and snorted. His rider clamped a pair of knife-roweled spurs into his ribs, always holding in tightly on the reins to keep him moving, to keep his eyes rolling.

All this, we learned later, was in sharp contrast to Negra's true disposition. But he was a strong and faithful beast, despite his laziness, and he did cut an inspiring figure there in the corral.

"How you like him?" asked Carranza.

"Swell," said Bob.

"He's all right," I mumbled, thinking about the one hundred and fifty pesos.

"But we can't take him," said Bob. "That is too much money. Let's see something else."

But it seemed we could not see anything else after watching the giant Negra dashing about among the

smaller horses and racing across the plains. At noon we still were looking and still had found nothing we wanted.

"Let's eat," said Carranza. "Then maybe we make a deal for the big black, no?"

So we ate under the blazing, border sun, and talked about Negra, about the old antagonism of the Mexican for the gringo, and about the country south of Villa Acuña. For lunch, we had canned sardines, a handful of little, round chili peppers, hard cornbread, and strips of dried goat meat torn from the carcass hanging beneath the rafters of the ranchhouse porch.

After lunch a deal was made. We were becoming impatient. We had been there half a day. Twenty miles of cactus-lined inferno lay between us and town. We agreed to pay forty pesos and an American twenty-dollar bill for Negra. In addition, Carranza had a horse near the village, he said, a three-year-old mustang "of much spirit and *muy fuerte*." Because we had bought Negra we might have this one for fifty pesos. He was to be my horse, and I closed the bargain without having seen him.

Carranza returned with us to Villa Acuña. On the way we stopped to looked at the other horse. Carranza had not lied. In selling us Negra he had used only honest deception. He was a dealer and we were buyers; he had outspared us and he made a profitable trade. But selling an animal "sight unseen" was another matter. He had given us his word regarding the value of our purchase. And our confidence in him was not misplaced.

The horse was a native mustang, mouse brown, with

three white feet and a star in his face. His eyes were like those of a frightened panther. He snorted and ran, straining at a halter, when we approached. His legs were slender, but strong, and they had been rope burned in many places. He held his head high, and his mane and tail seemed merged with the wind as he plunged and kicked, evading my testing fingers. Even Bob's inexperienced eye recognized the power and spirit of Pistole. "I believe you got the best of the bargain, after all," he said.

I went away with the feeling of a father for his newborn babe. Pistole was mine. Tomorrow he and I would have a little fight and he would learn to obey.

"I will bring him into the village early in the morning," Carranza said. "My man is bringing Negra. He will arrive late tonight. Tonight maybe we get drunk and seal the contract, no?"

We sealed the contract.

*Negra and Pistole Were Delivered
Shortly After the Village Awoke.*

CHAPTER II

NEGRA and Pistole were delivered shortly after the village awoke. Pistole had been ridden by Carranza, and it was apparent he already had received a lesson in behavior. His mouth was flecked with bloody foam. There were long scratches along his shoulders and sides. His body was glistening with sweat and he trembled in every muscle.

I looked him over slowly, noticing with satisfaction that his breathing was easy. I turned to Carranza. The Mexican was busy gathering up his saddle and blanket, and coiling his rope.

I continued to stare at him, and finally he glanced up, grinning. I passed my hand over the animal's side, and it came away dripping brine.

"It is very hot," Carranza said. "I thought you were in a hurry. I run him hard. He is all right, though."

While Carranza attended to having the horses shod, Bob and I bought supplies: Saddles, blankets, bridles; coffee, sugar, beans, bread; tin cups, plates and spoons. The storekeeper's wife made a canvas *maletta*—a bag to hold the food, extra clothing and the typewriter. We bought two one-gallon canteens to carry the water supply that would be needed in the desert country.

After much bickering, a burro named Chiquita was brought into our service. With her came a blanket and a pack saddle. The entire purchase amounted to thirteen pesos—less than five dollars—and we lost badly in the deal.

Before we were aware of it, a day had sailed almost to the western horizon.

Just at twilight we were ready for the take-off. The horses were saddled in the patio back of the Sabinas bar. Wili, the German youth, ran about seeing that everything was in order, that all the cinches were tied securely and the pack was fastened to the scrawny back of Chiquita. He departed only long enough to prepare food and wine for us, before we entered the southerly trail.

While we ate, Wili brought a bottle of *aguardiente* and placed it in our pack. We might need it as a medicine, he insisted; and he hushed our protests with a wink and a grin.

All was in readiness. Stared at by half the population of Villa Acuña, we repeated farewell to Señor Rivera and Wili, and rode off into the dusk, our faces toward San Carlos—and the City of Mexico.

*When Wili Placed the Bottle of Aguardiente
In Our Pack . . . We Considered it a Joke.*

CHAPTER III

WHEN Wili placed the bottle of aguardiente in our pack and suggested it might prove useful as a medicine, we considered it a joke. "In the United States," Bob told him, "such 'snake-bite remedy' is taken by men on fishing trips. Little fishing is done. But much precaution against snakes is drunk." We laughed, the three of us. We were young and strong, and filled with the confidence that is youth.

The desert, in the dusk, seemed quiet and pleasant. Pain and tragedy and nearness to death seemed strangers there.

We never had experienced a semi-tropical storm. We never had felt the inescapable dampness of the wet season, that seeps into flesh, undermining strength, melting resistance.

And, not knowing, we had made no preparations against the angry elements. After all, was this not the desert? Why worry about rain?

But wind and water in the desert's rainy season are dangerous things. Men and animals have been lost in them and never found. Bob and I left the border, clothed for the heat of summer. He had a light slicker; I had no raincoat at all. Wili's quart of aguardiente

proved to be our only fortification against the first attack of the wet season.

Even if we had known the danger, I think the hot, dusty days along the Río Grande would have lulled us into temporary forgetfulness. The heavy, hot sun of the wasteland turns a man's mind to ways of procuring sufficient water for his needs, not to methods of combating the precious liquid.

With laughter in our souls, we left Villa Acuña at dusk on a June night. Through the gathering dark we rode until ten o'clock before we lay down by a stream, saddles under our heads, faintly equine-odored saddle blankets under tired bodies. Chiquita was stubborn, true to her breed, and had to be dragged. Her resisting little hoofs and the half-heard sounds from the receding village were the only impertinences in the great, inspiring cathedral of night.

Occasionally there was a rustle of leafy *rebozos* among the praying corn stalks, as some mischievous small-boy breeze pattered through, nipping at bowed heads. Somewhere sounded a murmur of running water in the irrigation ditches spreading from the beating heart at San Martin dam, two hundred kilometers away, to produce green fields of *maize* on our right, leaving wastes of prickly pear and *choya blanca* on the left.

Sometimes, red jabs of cigarette fire danced by on burros' backs, like fireflies playing leap-frog. "*Buenas noches*," we would murmur, half afraid, and from behind the cigarette fire would echo, "*buenas noches*," low and soft in deference to the sanctity of night.

Pastoral smells were borne on every hint of moving

air. On every hillock were blurred white forms of closely huddled sheep and goats, always guarded by an invisible individual behind a pin-prick of the cigarette fire, and a dog that whined and became silent when its master answered our "*buenas noches.*"

A grove of large cottonwoods spread protecting arms above the brook where we dismounted, staked our horses, made our beds and went to sleep.

Cold, damp mist that turned to rain on clothes and blankets, awakened us at dawn, a dawn as dismal and earthy as the night had been inspiring and celestial.

Wet through, and shivering with cold, we packed and saddled our horses. When the light of day penetrated the leaden dome above the earth, we stopped and set a pot of coffee to boiling.

We rode to San Carlos through a steady downpour, over an unfinished road that had lain so long awaiting completion the desert was scarring it across.

At the edge of the village we met a funeral procession: A wagon carrying an unpainted pine box; a woman dressed in black, stumbling along in the mud; several small children; two men with shovels; four young girls in white, bearing flowers in their arms. We stopped our horses, removed our hats and stood aside, that they might pass.

A railroad ends at San Carlos, and soldiers were there to jab questing fingers into our packs.

We remained that sullen day in a native inn. We slept that night on a damp mattress made of corn shucks,

in a large, open room where the mist poured in through every paneless window and doorless doorway.

The bottle of aguardiente stood on the floor, beside the typewriter and the camera. The food and clothing, saddles and blankets were draped around on chairs, in hopes some of the dampness might dissipate.

Again we arose at dawn, more acutely conscious of a cold, uncomfortable clamminess. We donned wet clothes, drew on sticky, rain-softened boots. The saddles still were heavy with water.

Black clouds pushed up to meet us in the east. Rain followed, not gentle, considerate, cleansing rain of the north, but vicious, mad rain of the wet season in the tropics and near-tropics.

Swords of water slashed at our faces. Shots of water beat about our heads. Thunder added its frightful voice to the cannonade, and flares of lightning lighted the battlefield. Clothing offered no protection. In an hour it was run through by the saber thrusts, and streams were coursing down our bodies, into boots and socks, pouring off chins, noses and finger tips.

As far as was visible through the blinding gusts and the steam rising from the wasteland, the world was covered with water. The horses waded half to their knees, their heads low. They refused to walk in a straight line, but zigzagged and sideled along, trying to escape the relentless beat in their faces and eyes.

We, too, lowered our chins against our chests, leaned far over and rode on, hour after hour, mile after wet, weary mile.

To look for shelter was hopeless. There was none. In all that bleak countryside, which we traversed for thirty kilometers, there was no sign of human visitation. The irrigation ditches of San Martin had skipped over it as worthless of reclamation. Infrequent mesquite, bear grass, cacti, sage and thorn, scorched and unwatered for three-fourths of the year, now were battered down in mutilated, soggy heaps by the flailing hammers of long-stored rain.

"I think I know how the soldiers felt in 'sunny France,'" Bob shouted.

I hardly was able to control my clattering teeth as I shouted back. "We've got to find some sort of shelter soon. We can't push our horses into this all day without rest. They wouldn't last a week."

We came to a spur line of the railroad. A stream ran under it. Grass was green along the stream. A low trestle of logs had been built to bear the trains across the low places. Almost drowned, we grabbed at the straw. We crawled under the trestle and huddled against the muddy embankment. Our horses, rumps turned to the stinging whips of wind and water, chewed greedily at the tall grass.

Even the heavy canvas of the maleta had proved inadequate against the downpour. Fingers stiff with cold, and shriveled like a swimmer's too long in the water, poked about in the bag and dug out soggy, crumbling bread and a can of beans. We tried to make a fire. There was nothing dry enough even to smoke. Our teeth were clattering so persistently we could not eat.

"Something has got to be done, and quickly," Bob said. I agreed. My strength had been washed away completely. Several times I had passed points I felt were the limits of human endurance. I was wet to the bone. Violent chills shook my breath away and left me drooling at the mouth, like an idiot.

Then Bob thought of the aguardiente. He took the bottle from the maleta and poured out two half-cupfuls. By the time one of the cups reached my mouth, it was completely full from the streams of water that were falling everywhere.

I drank hungrily through blue lips against which the tin vessel scraped as if they had been leather. I trembled as a trail of fire shot downward, inside me.

Again the cups were half filled, and again drained.

Suddenly I wanted food, badly. The can of beans was opened and its contents divided into two tin plates. Water flowed down from the cross-ties above our heads. We swallowed rain-water and cold beans in gulps that emptied the plates. We wolfed handfuls of the sticky pudding that had been a loaf of bread.

Again we drank of the aguardiente. The quart had dwindled to less than a pint.

My stomach was a symphony of warm, soothingly harmonious tremors that increased and decreased with the alternate beats of my heart. I looked at the empty plates, washed clean by the falling rain. I laughed a far-away, detached laugh which conceived itself; to my ears it had no familiar qualities. Bob looked at me and he, too, laughed.

"It's a hell of a life, ain't it, kid?"

"Ain't it?" I echoed. "Where is your grammar, my boy? What would the fellows at Eton say if they could hear you now?"

Laughs, shrill, choking laughs, beginning and ending in violent shudders; laughs that left me weak and set my teeth pounding and stopped my breath; we stared at each other and laughed.

We drank again, full cups mingling with the rain and splashing over the top.

We saddled up and rode into the storm.

Long, black, semi-delirious hours later we stood stark naked in a mud hut at the *rancho*, La Salada.

It is twelve kilometers from the wooden trestle under which we stopped for lunch, to La Salada. To us, despite the inner warmth from the aguardiente, it was twelve years of torture. Only the nerve-quickenings waves from the alcohol kept us sense-perceptive to the route we were taking, or why we were taking it.

The rain which had cut into our faces and hammered at our bodies all day, gave way to the steady drip that ran men crazy in the dungeons of the Inquisition.

A feeling of abject helplessness was upon me. Our horses slid down yellow mud banks, climbed wearily across sage-gray hills, skirted seemingly magnetized streams and picked their paths across flats strewn with stones and thickets bristling with thorns. We resigned ourselves to an eternity of water-soaked jogging.

I despaired of mortal or divine intervention. I knew not where we were, nor whither we were being borne.

The thunder of swiftly moving water sounded in the

distance. It served only to aggravate a realization of the immovable forces of nature, of our own pitiful weakness.

"It is the river," Bob mumbled. "There are no towns here, no crossings. We have lost the way. We may have to turn back."

"Turn back! What to? It's thirty kilometers to San Carlos."

"Then we will have to follow the river south. Maybe we will chance upon a herdman's hut." His words dripped despair. I could not muster sufficient strength to answer him. We rode on toward the sound of the stream.

"Smoke," Bob shouted, and I pulled erect to see. There, from over a hill, beyond which thundered the swollen Río La Salada, a fragile smudge was sifting up through the banks of dampness.

Hope sprang into being. We passed a herd of goats in the lea of a mesquite thicket. A grove of cottonwoods huddled down in a draw, and through them came the smoke which had guided us hither. Beyond, dirty yellow against a background of rain-washed green, stretched a broad, swirling expanse of water heavy with desert sand.

An Indian woman stood under the eaves of an earthen *jacal*, and poked at a meager cone of fire. She stared, fear in her eyes, as we approached.

"Señora, we are wet and tired. We have ridden many miles through the storm. Can we obtain shelter here?"

"But no, señores. Only my husband and I live in this place. But there," she indicated a wall of adobe brick,

barely visible through the trees. "Perhaps you may receive aid of the *ranchero*."

Two square, windowless houses squatted under a ramada of closely bundled leaves. The *ranchero* and one of his helpers met us, and offered hospitality.

Our horses were fed stacks of dry wheat straw. We were quartered in one of the mud houses. In the center of its bare, earthen floor a fire was built. Confiscated chicken roosts were arranged in a circle about the glowing flare of warmth; and everything we owned, every rag we had worn was draped across them to dry. Stakes were driven in the ground, on which boots were hung, upside down, to drip. Saddles were thrown across the wooden rafters under the roof, where only part of the heat might reach, so they would not be warped in the drying.

The *ranchero* brought a square of canvas for us to sleep upon, and we fell down, nude as the hours of our births, shaking with exhaustion.

The husband of the Indian woman came with a pone of cornbread and a bowl of beans. His employer, our host, kicked a handful of brands from the fire, and set a pot of coffee to bubbling.

Food was pushed to us, on the floor, and we ate greedily. Warmth returned and the blood again found its way into my lifeless hands and feet. Intoxicating streams pumped through my limbs and I moved them stiffly, testingly.

Outside, it was dark. The *ranchero* and his man had gone to their beds. The fire still was burning brightly

in our hut. Great clouds of steam billowed up from the clothing hung on the chicken roosts.

I rolled over on my back, a piece of cornbread in one hand, a spoon in the other. A golondrina was flitting about on one of the rafters, protesting because it was long after his roosting time and the room was light as day. Bob was snoring softly, a coffee cup dangling from his fingers. I ate my cornbread, and pulled a corner of the canvas across my companion's yellow, Japanese body. He started; his eyes opened suddenly. There was a look of stark, primitive fear in them. Then he remembered where he was. He smiled.

"Bob, what does the word *aguardiente* correspond to in English?"

"As near as I can figure it out," he said, "it is 'fire-water'." He turned over and resumed his snoring.

Sleep came over me in quickening waves, like an anaesthetic too rapidly administered.



*I Was Dragged from a Deep Sleep
In the Middle of the Night.*

CHAPTER IV

I WAS dragged from a deep sleep in the middle of the night. There sounded the crash of suddenly broken branches. Somewhere off in the darkness, I heard the struggles of powerful bodies, a frenzied threshing in heavy undergrowth. There was a second crash, diminishing struggles, silence.

The quinine I had taken was creating a thousand tiny buzz-saws in my brain. Where was I? I felt a saddle under my head and the hard earth under my body. I stretched my legs and they were stiff. Then I remembered the trouble I had had that afternoon, getting Chiquita, the burro, across a narrow arroyo, so we might make camp.

A week had passed since we left the border.

For days we had been warned against bandits, and we had built our little fire far back from the trail,—the trail that leads from Sabinas to Barroteran. Off there to the right, I thought, the smokestack at Rosita is hidden by the night.

Bob and I, then, were alone in the desert, miles from the nearest community of sympathetic human beings.

The second crash in the brush cleared the pin-wheels from my brain and jerked me erect. I felt for Bob. He was not there!

Fear drew my boots on, and I ran through the darkness toward the sound of the struggle.

The beautiful Monday we left the Rancho La Salada, our friends there warned us: "At Zaragoza there are bad men. They may shoot you and take your horses."

That night we slept in Zaragoza. We entered the town at dark, and rode along a narrow street walled in closely by the blank, staring fronts of unlighted adobe houses. Human sounds and human smells filled the air. Cigarettes winked on doorsteps. Whispers and the soft laughter of lovers sounded at grilled windows. Far off there was a guitar. Peaceful, I thought. But the silence bred suspicion.

Suddenly dim street lights flashed on. Pistole leaped. His girt had loosened during the long day's travel. I went off over his head and landed on my feet, the reins in my hand. The saddle swung under the horse's belly. He kicked at it twice and went crazy with fear, rearing and pitching all over the street.

A crowd gathered about us. I pulled Pistole down, unbuckled the cinch, and he kicked clear, trembling, poised for flight. I talked to him, petted him, rubbed him lightly with my hand until he ceased flinching and allowed me to replace his saddle.

Persons about us began asking questions. Bob told them we were American engineers and that we were going to Monclova.

"Watch out for bandits," one of them said. "It is safe here in Zaragoza. We are simple folk. But at Rosita there are bad men. They will knife you for your horses."

We spent that night at Zaragoza.

Next day at noon we stopped beside an irrigation ditch south of Allende.

Bob was sitting with his back to a tree, digging out some copy to send to St. Louis. I was lying flat on my stomach, staring into the cool, swift waters of the stream.

"*Buenas tardes, señores.*" It was a man's voice. I jumped to my feet. Bob was sitting unmoved, fingers poised above the keyboard of his typewriter, his eyes seeking the owner of the voice.

An old man and a small boy stepped from behind a hedge of prickly pear.

"*Buenas tardes.*" I sat down again.

"Have a cigarette," Bob offered. It is a Mexican custom. The man took one and squatted down beside us.

"*¿De dónde vienen?*" he asked.

"From Villa Acuña."

"*¿Y adónde van?*"

"To Monclova. We are engineers from the United States."

"Yes?" He looked at the typewriter and the camera tied to Bob's saddle. "Be careful of *los bandidos*. You are safe here in the ranch country. But at Rosita there are mines and factories. There you will find the bad men."

"There are Americanos there, too," he added. The tone he employed in *Americanos* was the same as in *bandidos*.

In the afternoon, we crossed the graveled highway that leaves Piedras Negras and meanders aimlessly about until, quite by chance, it finds itself in Monterrey. Off-

cials of the customs, posted at the property line of an extensive ranch, studied our credentials. "You have no arms?" they asked. "Be careful. There are bad men in the brush."

That night we camped high on a hillside, and covered our campfire with a flat stone.

Next day we traveled straight ahead, and all day the smokestack at Rosita was our lodestar. We saw no other human sign until we arrived at the mining town.

Stories of the brigands at Rosita had struck persisting chords in the back of my mind, and that infernal smokestack, which every hour seemed just over the next hill but eluded us until dark was brewing, became a symbol of the danger and uncertainty just beyond the horizon.

We slept at the American Club in Rosita. We had breakfast with the matron, a quiet, motherly woman from Montgomery, Alabama. "You must be careful," said Mrs. Hobbs. "There are bandits in the country. We here in the American colony are practically safe. We have ways of defending ourselves. But do be careful in the desert."

We ate lunch at a hotel in Sabinas. A young American from Brownsville, Texas, sat at the table next to ours. He was the state representative of a United States credit firm, we learned. "I have been threatened several times," he said. "I always manage to get into some town by nightfall. You had better keep on your toes, out there in the brush." He gave us a package of "real" cigarettes and wished us luck.

Since morning, I had fought against the alternate hot and cold waves of malaria. That night in camp, I determined, I would attempt to check the fever with a double dose of quinine.

The way from Sabinas to Barroteran traverses a waste of dwarfed cacti, agave, mesquite and greasewood. The season's rains had not reached it the day we passed through. The only breaks in the flatness of the land were dry arroyos and infrequent sand pits scooped out by the hot winds. The surface of the earth was cracked by the heat. The serpentine trail appeared to have been formed by the passings of hoofed animals.

Just before dark we arrived at a stream of clear, cold water. It offered blessed relief from the desert. A congregation of praying cottonwoods huddled about its shrine. A hill draped its skirts in the water, and the path crossed at its feet and loitered around, to avoid a climb.

The knoll was well clothed with mesquite and prickly pear, and offered plentiful cover for the wary pilgrim in a brigand-infested country.

"We had better make camp in the brush there, back from the road," Bob said, pointing up the hillside.

The trail crossed the stream on a flat shelf of stone. The stone was cleft in its center and water ran in the cleft to the shelf's edge. There it dropped in a flashing veil of mist and foam on jagged rocks, twenty feet below. The cleft was barely a foot across, and our horses stepped over, hardly noticing except to shy slightly from the roar of the falls. Chiquita, the burro, however, developed a burst of temperament and refused to cross.

Twilight was fading rapidly. I was weak and cold with malarial chills, and impatient to draw close to a warm fire with a pot of coffee boiling at its edge. "You find a good spot to camp, and build a fire while I get the donkey across," I called to Bob. He rode off up the hill.

I moved behind Chiquita and sought to drive her over the cleft in the rock. She dodged by me and ran back the way we had come. I rounded her up and tried a second time. Again she dodged by me. And again and again. I was in no mood for dueling. I threw my rope over her neck and tried to drag her across. She slid a short distance. Then, planting all four of her feet, she jerked Pistole to a stop. I waited a moment, hoping to catch her off guard, and pulled again. Her refusal to move her limbs and the direction in which I was forced to drag, slid her dangerously near the edge of the falls. I stopped and released my lariat.

Chiquita calmly laid herself down, pack and all. I dismounted and attempted to coax her across. She refused to get up. I walked behind her and kicked with the toe of my boot. Chills were playing at tag up and down my body. My face was burning with fever. My knees trembled. I sat down to rest.

Chiquita arose to her feet and looked at me. I struck at her with a quirt and she started to run by. I grabbed her by the head and dragged her to the water's edge. She balked and stood there, refusing to move farther.

I was too weak to reason. My mind was a whirlpool. I was trembling with such violence my elbows were drawn hard against my sides and my teeth rattled like

castanets. Up there in the brush, I knew, Bob was building a fire—and putting down his saddle for a pillow.

I got behind Chiquita, put my shoulder under her stubborn, little rump and literally lifted her over the cleft in the rock.

She trotted merrily up the hill, to join Bob and Negra. I fell back on the cold stone, exhausted. A few minutes later I pulled myself onto my horse and followed the burro.

Bob was waiting. Water was boiling. Coffee was being prepared. I threw my saddle under a mesquite tree and spread my blanket. I wandered about gathering stones to place about the fire, so it might not be seen by malicious eyes. Then I led the horses off into a thicket and staked them where they would not be visible from the trail. Finally, I uncoiled my rope and threw a large loop about my bed, an old Plains precaution against rattlesnakes.

Swallowing a cup of coffee, and two capsules of quinine from the first aid kit, I pulled off my boots and fell asleep without speaking.

I do not know how long I had been asleep when the crash in the brush dragged me awake.

I do not believe I actually heard it through my ears. Its vibrations, I think, slapped against my body, and my muscles responded entirely by reflex. The quinine, coupled with complete exhaustion, had drugged me.

The first moment of consciousness that crept through the haze found me sitting erect, shaking my head which would not quit its spinning. There was a mad struggle

among the desert plants. The night was dark with a blackness that makes you feel completely alone in an infinite void. The fire was out. I felt for Bob and he was not there.

The struggle still was going on. I reached for my boots, drew them on and climbed weakly to my feet, waiting. There was another crash of breaking brush. The threshing sound increased. I ran toward it, silently. Prickly pear slapped me in the face, limbs and thorns tore at my clothing. I dodged black shapes, blacker than the night.

The struggle ceased and calm sucked in after it, like water closing over a sinking ship.

Then I remembered and ran forward. Pistole, hopelessly tangled in rope and broken mesquite branches, was lying in a bed of cactus, his entire body covered with needles. I rapidly untied him, and he stood up. I called Bob and he answered from the darkness off to my right,

"I thought you were asleep," he said. "We tied the horses too short. Negra got tangled in the limbs and fell. I have been trying to untie him for five minutes. Pistole just fell."

I laughed a wild, popping sort of laugh that relieved the tension from my arms and legs.

"What is so funny?" Bob growled. "I bet I have a million cactus needles in both feet,—and you ought to see this horse. He looks like a pin cushion."

I laughed again. "To hell with the cactus needles in your feet. I had visions of daggers between your shoulder blades."

*Every Day We Had Grown More Convinced
Chiquita Was Holding Us at Too Slow a Pace.*

CHAPTER V

EVERY day, we had grown more convinced Chiquita was holding us at too slow a pace. The first night out of Villa Acuña she had to be dragged along at the end of a rope. In the storm near San Carlos she continually was breaking away from the caravan and dashing out into the water-soaked brushland, where we needs must spur our dejected mounts and worry her back to the fold. At the River San Diego she had refused to cross the newly suspended bridge, but her miniature hoofs served as runners when we looped her with our ropes and snaked her across.

South of Allende she suddenly decided to rest. Pack and all, she quietly laid herself in the middle of the trail and refused to budge. Coaxing, pleading, threatening, whipping and dragging, each in its turn, failed to make an impression. After more than an hour of this, we decided she was ill.

Her pack was removed, and we called an Indian from a near-by field, intending to ask him to take her and nurse her back to health. Before the Indian reached us, however, Chiquita arose, loitered over to a patch of grass and began grazing.

The Indian was given cigarettes and sent back to his hoe. Chiquita was saddled and her pack replaced. The

knotted end of a rope sent her trotting off toward Zaragoza.

That night she emulated the antics of Pistole and rattled through town, parrying at every street light with her rear hoofs, to the obvious amusement of the populace. Later she tried to devour the hotel keeper's flower garden and two of his wife's best bedspreads.

At Rosita she was tied at the back of the ice plant, and gave us no trouble at all. She seemed completely awed by the donkey engine that produced the factory power.

But that night in the brush between Sabinas and Barroteran she made up, in bounteous measure, for her good behavior. Not only did she, aided by the malaria, completely sap my strength and wreck my good disposition, but she converted me to the idea that we could dispense entirely with her services. A brief conference revealed that Bob, too, had enjoyed enough of the company of burros. When Chiquita refused to cross that narrow stream above the waterfall, she unwittingly proffered her resignation. And it was accepted.

Noon next day found us at a tiny cool spot in the center of an almost endless inferno of wasteland, six kilometers south of Barroteran. A reservoir had been built at the bottom of a watershed off the foothills. Willow thickets helped reënforce the earthwork. Grass grew fresh and green where the moisture crept up through the banks. There were two towering cottonwoods. All about was the desert, and the sun that burns into a white man's brain and saps the vigor from an Indian's body.

An ancient steam pump, and the jacal of the man who operated it stood at one end of the reservoir. The water, the operator told us, was piped away to the railroad stops in the desert, where it was used to quench the thirst of the puffing engines and the little brown men who make their homes along the threads of steel.

We asked if we might bathe in the reservoir. We were assured such procedure was entirely all right, if we cared for it. Our horses drank and began grazing about beneath the willows, where the heat from the furnace door of the sun partially was deflected.

A woman was washing clothes and spreading them on the stones to dry. A rebozo was coiled about her head, like a turban. A long skirt swept the ground around her bare feet. A chocolate-colored child played near by, innocent of clothing. The mother, too, was unclad from her waist up, and her large, full breasts were without shame.

I undressed quickly, conscious of my too-white body, and dived into the water. Bob followed. The woman never looked up from her washing.

The pumpman came down and sat on the bank, talking to us as we bathed. An Indian, in dirty "pyjama" breeches and a straw sombrero, joined him. There was a big machete in the back of the Indian's belt. Bob got out of the water, slipped into a pair of shorts and sat down near our pack, speaking quietly with the two Mexicans. I swam about lazily.

Bob took the typewriter from the maleta, placed it on his knees and began writing. The pumpman and the peon moved nearer him, their eyes riveted on the flying

keys of the machine. I could see them pointing, hear the echo of their questioning voices. Bob held it out to them, and the pumpman touched it cautiously, drawing back. Bob set the typewriter aside. The Indian drew his knife, balanced it proudly on his palm and extended it to my companion. Bob ran his thumb along the blade's edge and whistled softly. The peon's face was beaming. Bob had won another admirer. I began to enjoy the swim.

He called to me, in English: "We can find Chiquita a good home here, I think. Do you want to leave her?" I came ashore and put on the trunks to my underwear.

We talked a while of nothing, as is the custom of traders. Occasionally we pointed to the burro, noting her many superior qualities.

The Indian was very poor, he said. He had no money. He had one mule and a cow. He used the pair of them in breaking the earth for his maize.

Chiquita was a faithful beast, Bob remarked. She was nimble of foot and strong of muscle. A cow, too, must be a poor companion for a donkey at the plow. We desired to leave our animal where she would be treated with kindness, we admitted, but we must transport our pack to a railroad station, where the typewriter and our surplus clothing might be expressed to Saltillo. Food and camera, we decided, might be carried on the saddles.

It was mentioned, casually, that we gladly would give Chiquita to the man who would place our belongings in a box ready for shipment, and accompany us to Aura, eight kilometers away, where they might be placed on a train.

Sardines and *galletas* (animal crackers) were dug

from the maleta, and our friends were invited to share a meal with us. We sat down upon the earth, all four of us, with food between our knees. As we ate, Bob remarked that a man who owned two burros and a cow must be very wealthy. The sun was slipping westward. A breeze lifted up and fanned a minute spark of ambition in the Indian's breast. He wiped the olive oil from his mouth with the back of his hand, and stole away up the side of the reservoir.

Soon he was back with an old, broken crate in which chickens had lived. We lined the box with copy paper, loaded in things we could get along without and nailed the boards together, using the back of the peon's knife as a hammer. A length was cut from the pack rope, to bind the flimsy container more securely.

The Indian mounted Chiquita, our belongings held before him, and we rode to Aura.

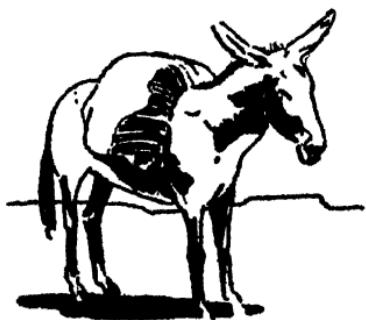
The crate was expressed at a railroad station which stood like a sentinel post, overlooking a half dozen mud huts. We filled our canteens at the public well, and turned to ride into the desert. A feeling of freedom was upon us. The sun was a halo above the sierras to the west.

That night we slept on the ground in the barnyard of a *ranchita*. The ranch owner dragged roasting-ears from the fire before his door, and tossed them to us to eat. He sent a cup of fresh milk and two eggs, by one of his children.

We chased the pigs and chickens and colts and dogs away, and lay down on the earth to sleep.

Not far to the north a happy Indian probably was

dragging his heels in the dust, his cigarette fire bobbing up and down. Chiquita, jogging placidly between his lithe, brown legs, was going to replace the cow that aided the mule in breaking the earth for his maize.



*Deserted Ranches, Deserted Houses
And Deserted Villages Mark Mexico . . .*

CHAPTER VI

DESERTED ranches, deserted houses and deserted villages mark Mexico as indelibly in reality as do revolutions, bandits, cactus, dogs and giant sombreros, in the minds of foreigners.

Many noble haciendas with their adjoining churches, inspiring piles in pink and gray and dusty white, are devoid of human sounds. Wide, oaken doors, originally carved by skilled hands, now more intricately marked by the pathways of tiny worms and the sandblasts blown from the desert floor, swing on rusty hinges of hammered iron. Great patios, once alive with laughter and music and the splash of exultant fountains, are silent and weed grown. Even the bougainvillea, climbing to the housetop and draping the wall with its sarape of red and green, has a dejected look.

Soon the desert things will violate the quasi-sanctity of the place, and destroy the man-favored beauty.

Ahead of the traveler on the winding road, a town slips into view. Clusters of white houses form petals about the golden dome of a church, set high on a hill beneath a halo of clouds.

But proximity brings disillusion. Most of the houses are empty and in ruins. Only here and there a native sprawls in the shade of a ramada and a burro dozes at

a hitching post. The church doors are locked. Walls and roofs have fallen. The flower of the distance is not a flower. It is a skeleton. Distant beauty, at more intimate sight, turns to depressive ugliness and repulsion. Death is there. Even the dogs have gone.

Across the unbroken plain of the desert a railway leads. But its rails are rusty, and the sand and sage have begun their task of interment. Above the horizon stand low, flat houses, towering chimneys, a gaunt ore crusher, a water tank of corrugated tin that flashes foreignly in the sun. From the distance it appears a city of industry. But smoke is missing. The power of noise and movement is replaced by silence, the audible silence of places where ambition lies buried.

Here, too, are skeletons, many skeletons. To the remains of adobe walls and wooden arches are added more modern ruins of iron and steel. There is no church here. The center is an office building, skulking behind a stone wall, its windows boarded. An useless sign recalls the penalty for trespassing.

Automobiles are parked in the street. But they have been there, unmoved, for several years. Their tops have rotted away, their tires returned to dust. Only the most durable parts remain. The rain and the sand have obliterated all traces of paint. They have become skeletons, skeletons of a progress that presumed to strike at the lethargy of Mexico.

The once bustling industrial center stands deserted. The Englishman or American who attempted this abortion in the timeless wasteland, has gone back to his

mother country,—or to the earth that moves to blot out his sacrilege.

These deserted places in Mexico find varied explanations in the mouths of the natives, the many Indians, the few mestizos.

"It is the revolution, señor," or the bandits. "It is the tariffs of the government, señor," or, "It is the agrarian movement, señor. The troops have taken Don Sebastian's ranch. It will be divided into little farms, and every peon will be given land. Is it not wonderful? There will be land for all."

Once there were laughter, Spanish laughter, and music. Now there is desert. An Indian has stabled his burro in the patio of the *casa grande*. Broken pieces of tall, old colonial furniture crackle sullenly in the fire beneath an earthen pot of frijoles.

The ruins of Mexican haciendas and the words of the natives reminded me of the stories my grandmother told, of the plantation life in my own South. Once there were slender, white columns, crinoline skirts, music, laughter, life and beauty. Then came war, and "forty acres and a mule."

But in my South there were men and women who fought for a principle. In Mexico, to fight, unless there be material loot, is illogical. Compromise is more lasting. The desert covers scars. A thousand years are as today, yesterday, mañana. The day of the colonial hacienda in Mexico is past. The revolutionary government has decreed it. The Indian remains silent, awaiting time to bring back the wilderness. The Spaniard

looks back at the home his ancestors shaped from the earth, and passes on, regretting.

Industry comes, but greed and graft drive it out. Again the silent Indian awaits the healing desert. Silver loses its value and the mines close. The duty on oil is increased and the wells are sealed. The United States gluts the market with iron and the smelters fail to pay. The Americanos and the Englishmen quit the land. The natives leave the company houses of tin and stucco, and return to their *jacales* of earth and leaves.

Lampacitos was the first of the deserted industrial towns we visited.

We had passed many haciendas, silent and falling in ruins, and we were to pass many more. We had ridden through vacant streets lined with empty, broken houses. Of these, too, we were to see many another.

It was an hour after noon on the day following our successful donkey trade, that Lampacitos emerged from beneath a glaring horizon. I emitted an audible sigh of relief at the prospect of a shelter from the desert sun.

We had ridden since dawn, through a parched, breathless, lifeless valley between two mountain ranges. Occasionally we had seen, far off, miniature whirlwinds that gathered close to the earth and lifted columns of dust toward the sky. But no bit of the breeze reached us. A wilderness of wavering heat lines had imprisoned us as we rode from the ranchita south of Aura to the piles of rusting machinery at Lampacitos.

It was nine hours of torture to Bob. It was nine hours

of self-inflicted punishment that I have no desire to repeat.

When we left the ranch it still was dark. A splash of red at the end of the earth showed where the day would begin. We filled our canteens with fresh water from the well, ate a breakfast of coffee, warm milk and rolls, and rode away.

The sun burst from the oven door of hell, and began its pendulum swing to closer proximity with the earth.

We stopped periodically, to stand in the shade of the horses' bodies, canteens to parched lips, part of the water escaping to trickle down beneath our clothing. The metal containers became too hot to hold with bare hands, their contents warm and unpalatable. Still we drank, often and greedily.

At noon we seemed in the center of an endless void containing only us and the sun. The few scrubby plants had been burned black, as if by a passing flame. The yellow dust of the desert floor swirled up beneath the horses' hoofs like spirals of smoke.

Bob and Negra, silent heads lowered, began to fall behind. Pistole continued his steady pace, and I, hunched far over in an attempt to escape the blistering heat, allowed him to pick his own way. Constantly, eyes streaming tears that creased the dirt on my cheeks, I scanned the horizon for a sign of human habitation.

A flash of metal caught my attention. I gave Pistole a gentle dig with my heels. I looked back. Bob was a hundred yards to the rear. He stared toward me, and his lips were moving. I thought he was telling me he, too, had seen the flash of sun on tin. I rode on.

A water tank thrust itself up from the desert. A skeleton of steel followed. Houses appeared, houses and widely scattered pieces of abandoned machinery.

Great rusted cog-wheels, broken steel cables and battered ore cars lay in abandoned profusion on a sage-grown section of railway track. I rode into a street where coarse, burnt grass protruded from the cinders.

There was not a living thing in sight. The houses were falling in ruins. I continued to the water tank. Two scraggy mesquite trees stood near its base, but there was no water. I looked out across the patio to the company headquarters, a long, low building with shuttered windows, a picket fence and a sign in both English and Spanish, "Keep Out." Before it stood an automobile of aged model, sans wheels, sans top and sans paint. A delivery truck in similar state was parked on the opposite corner, in front of a duplex house with empty flower boxes on the porch.

It was useless to stop here, I thought. There was no fresh water, no grass for the horses. We must rest awhile, eat in the shade of one of the crumbling walls, then push on across the desert. I dropped to the ground and took the saddle off Pistole. Bob and Negra were crossing the railroad track. I waited while they drew nearer.

Bob was looking at me with anger in his eyes, narrowed, bloodshot eyes from which tears had run, leaving pale streaks across his dust-covered face. He cursed me violently, and started from his horse. I stepped to his side. He staggered as I caught his arm.

"Why didn't you stop when I called you?" he mum-

bled. His lips were dry and cracked; the skin was dangerously white about his mouth. "Are you stone? Haven't you any feeling at all?"

"We couldn't stop in that hell out there, Bob. It would have been suicide. We had to keep riding until we could find shelter from that sun. It will bake a man's brain."

"But I—I couldn't . . ." He clamped his teeth together, drew himself erect and began brushing the dust of the desert off his shoulders.

It was then we saw the girl standing on the steps of one of the houses across the plaza. In her hands she held an earthen jar, and water splashed from it as she walked through the doorway. We stumbled across the scorched earth, toward the house.

The girl greeted us and invited us to enter. An old man sat in a splint chair. "This is grandpa," she said. "He is very old. He can not leave his chair." She looked past us into the deserted street. "That is why we are here, señores."

"May we have water?" Bob asked.

"But certainly, señor. I have just brought it here. It is fresh and cool."

We drank a long time, but slowly, in small sips. Bob sat on the floor, with his back against the wall, while I returned to the horses to get food from the pack.

We ate corned beef from the can, and hard, white bread we had brought from Sabinas. The girl and old man watched us, and there was hunger in their eyes but they refused an invitation to join us. They already had eaten their *comida*, they insisted.

We managed to leave part of the beef, and they did not refuse that which was left.

We sat down to rest and the sun was low before we resumed the trip to Hermanas. The girl had long braids of black hair, and full, red lips. Her body was slim and round. Her eyes were bright, and bare feet and legs flashed beneath her heavy skirts as she fluttered about the room.



*Hermanas is the Health Resort
Of Northern Mexico.*

CHAPTER VII

HERMANAS is the health resort of northern Mexico. Many and varied are the healing properties claimed for the warm, slightly saline waters of its hot springs. Many are the ailments that are brought to be washed away in their soothing depths.

The baths are hidden in a grove of trees, half a mile from the town. A maze of grassy-edged streams spreads leisurely from twin fissures at the base of a hill. From these fissures the earth offers up its medicines for the good of man. Along the banks of the green fringed channels the afflicted sit and bathe their limbs, and pray for relief.

Those who suffer only minor ills bathe near the springs. The "untouchables" go farther abroad to the more remote streams which lead into the River Aura. There, under the clean blue of the sky, they bare themselves to the blessed touch of "the waters of God."

We had not heard of the baths of Hermanas when we rode from the deserted valley of Lampacitos. We expected to find just another sun-blistered village traversed by a donkey trail. As we neared the town, however, we came upon a newly constructed gravel highway. Two mounted vaqueros clattered up and matched their pace to ours, accepting cigarettes and giving crude

pleasantries in return. A caravan of burros loaded with *ixle*, hemp made from maguey fibers, sifted by, their driver answering our "buenas tardes."

Hills, like earth-covered pyramids, thrust upward from the flat plain. And atop every hill was a cross, reaching skyward.

Adobe huts heralded a center of population. The tops of elm trees peeped over a parabolic meadow. Through the meadow the roadway ran, down by a hotel asleep under the elms.

Eight doorways framed in lifeless gray concrete, like a cell block in a county jail—such is the hotel at Hermanas. Looking closer, the tall, green spikes of the trees before it, make it appear like a row of tombs with gaping mouths. But women and children seek its rectangle of shade, as the sun drops over its shoulder to the western sierra.

A fat, Spanish woman sat in a cane chair and played with a baby on her lap. A long, disjointed dog lay at her feet. Above her head, a wire had been stretched between two of the elms. On this wire were hung bunches of grapes, displayed for sale.

Eight days we had ridden through the desert, eating sardines and animal crackers, frijoles and tortillas; squeezing stingy, little limes into our water canteens; dreaming of fresh, cold oranges, grapefruits, mint juleps and bunches of grapes like Moses' men brought from the Promised Land.

The grapes hanging from a wire in front of the Hotel Los Baños in Hermanas, were neither very large nor very blue, and the sun almost had made raisins of them.

But when I looked at them my mouth twitched, as it used to do at the sight of a lemon.

We spoke to the señora holding the child. Were they her grapes? "But certainly, señores. In my garden are many sweet grapes." We dismounted.

"We will buy all you have here. How much are they?"

"But these, señor, are not good. All day they have been in the sun. If you will sit down and rest awhile, I will bring fresh ones from the vines."

We unsaddled. The hotel owner, a thin, energetic red-haired German, husband of the señora of the grapes, led our horses away to the green grass at the back of the garden. We engaged a room and meal for the night. Then we sat under the trees and ate grapes until our lips were sore and teeth felt as if they had been filed.

As we ate, a small, brown man with Oriental eyes, came from the "cell" next to ours. Bob looked at him and smiled. No answering smile appeared. The man turned his head and started to walk away. Bob began speaking in Japanese. He faced about, a question on his lips, and came over to our table. Slowly he studied the almost six-foot stature, the broad shoulders and the strong, slender limbs of my friend. Doubt remained in his eyes. A volley of sound, interspersed with audible intakes of breath and punctuated at regular intervals with a word that registered, in my uninitiated ears, as "zja", rolled over his tongue. Bob repaid him in like currency, and a grin gathered on his pumpkin-pie face.

I never knew the content of their strange, Oriental hissing, but the little, brown man evidently was con-

vinced of Bob's nationality and, after being presented to me, he became our companion for the remainder of the afternoon.

It was he who told us of the hot baths, and insisted that we go with him for a dip. He was a widely traveled man, and he declared, although his rheumatism had received treatment in many places and from many doctors, he had known no relief until he came to Hermanas.

So we, afflicted only with a slight attack of saddle sores, went up to *los baños* with our Japanese friend.

Emaciated persons of both sexes were lying about on the grass by the edges of the wandering streams, their limbs dangling in the water. Children were at play among the flowers. Burros were tied to the trees. A man and his numerous family were filling a barrel, lashed to a cart, with the precious liquor spewed up from the earth.

Two adobe cabins stood at the base of a hill, roofless, and with frayed pieces of canvas over the doorways. Inside these, our friend told us, we might bathe in privacy. Here, too, was the source of the springs, and the medicines in the water contained their fullest quota of curative powers, untapped by the hungry roots of plants and untouched by the sorely afflicted ones.

We sat down on a grass bank and drew off our boots. Then we walked to the door of one of the cabins. A shriek of feminine laughter, and the flash of two white bodies in the spring, drove us back. We sat again on the green earth, smoking cigarettes, until two pretty señoritas, clothed now, came out of the bathhouse and ran, giggling, down the path toward the hotel. We

bathed where they had bathed, in water so warm we must temper ourselves to it by degrees.

Stiffness from the saddle gone, we returned to the inn for a supper of *huevos rancheros*—eggs, country style, cooked in tomatoes and chili—frijoles, rice, tortillas, cold beer and, finally, a basket of sweet grapes.

While we ate, the hotel owner busied himself at a host of trivial tasks which brought him often into the dining room, and near its single table where we sat. He watched us closely from the corner of his eye. Occasionally he asked about the condition of roads to the north, or about some town that was unknown to us. Bob explained that we had not come by the highway, that we stopped, more often than not, at ranches and small villages, and that we were acquainted only with the part of the country through which we had passed.

I watched the man's face as Bob talked to him. His expression revealed that, for some reason, he did not believe a word my companion was telling him.

Apparently something was burdening his mind which he hesitated to question us about. He stood a moment, as if inwardly debating the issue. He went into the kitchen and we could hear him moving around among the kettles and pans. He returned with a greasy, paper-backed ledger and placed it on the table, between us. "Señores, it is customary to sign the book in hotels of this country. And," he added hastily, "to record your address and the nature of your business." His speech ended in a flutter of words. Bob smiled and wrote our names, and our address as St. Louis, Mo.,

U. S. A. He closed the ledger with a gesture of finality. Our host quite plainly was disappointed at the omission of our "business", but he only muttered "gracias, señor," and laid the book aside.

Bob looked up at him and asked calmly, in German, "My good friend, will you join us in a bottle of beer?"

"*Mein guter Herr,*" burst from the man's lips, like a passionate prayer, "why did you not tell me you speak German? For many years I have been in this God-for-saken country, and seldom do I hear the language of my fatherland." He drew up a chair, and called to his native wife, telling her to bring "*tres cervezas.*" Whereupon, he set off with a guttural bombardment of words, too rapidly spoken and of too complex structure for my feeble *Deutsche*.

I sat quietly by, and drank my beer. Bob nodded and smiled, smiled and nodded, with never a chance to speak a syllable.

In this manner were we entertained until our host had talked himself out of breath. He was expounding, Bob told me later, on the natural shiftlessness and lack of public pride among the natives. He also was explaining how, through his own industry, and a fortunate marriage, he had become owner of the hotel and hot springs of Hermanas, and how he was striving to make the town a place of beauty and comfort, the springs a haven for the afflicted.

When he had done, he sat a moment, and a look of cunning crept into his eyes. "My friends," he spoke slowly, as if he were choosing his words carefully, "your horses are of the army, *nicht wahr?*"

"No, Herr. We bought them of the *aduanos* at Villa Acuña," Bob answered.

"You can not deceive me," the German chuckled knowingly. Then, hastily, "but your secret is safe with me, my friends. In the *vaterland* I, too, have gone on private missions for my government." He lowered his voice.

"The officers at Washington are smart. They send youths to this country. They know these simple folk will not suspect the nature of your business. But I know, gentlemen. I know. The manner in which you sit your horses shows it to me. I, too, was once an army man."

"You are mistaken, *mein Herr*." There was a hint of impatience in Bob's tone. "We are students. We are on no secret mission for the United States government. In fact, I am not American. I am Japanese."

For a moment the look of cunning faded from the German's face. But presently it returned, magnified tenfold. "Japanese?" he whispered hoarsely. "Ah, it is as serious as that?" He turned to me. "You are American, is it not so?" I mumbled affirmation. "But why, why, my good friends, should two so powerful nations combine in their designs on poor, little Mexico?" He spread his hands on the table edge, and leaned forward, peering into Bob's face for an answer.

"But, *mein armer Herr*," Bob started to protest.

"It is all right, gentlemen. I will push you no further. I understand these things." He winked broadly, and arose to leave the room. "Do not worry. Your secret is safe with me."

His wife entered, with apologies, and began clearing the table.

The two señoritas of the baths passed the doorway, carrying food. "They are taking it to the old woman at the springs. She is near death of a dangerous disease, and we do not allow her in the hotel," explained the wife of our host.

"She is their mother. They have the room but two from yours."

We slept on a knotty mattress of corn shucks. In my dreams I encountered a withered hag wrapped in sack cloth, bathing in a cloud of steam wafted up from the hot springs. Nearby, a path ran through a woodland. A gaunt horseman, wearing a pointed helmet, and an iron cross around his neck, charged along the path. Before his extended lance, fled two señoritas with streaming black hair and flashing teeth.

As I was preparing to cast myself between the pursuer and the charming pursued, an army of winged men swooped down and, setting hands on the horseman, they bore him away. Each of the winged men had a smiling, Oriental face.

I joined the two young women. Theirs was more than earthly beauty. The windows of their eyes were unshaded and a soft light glowed about the inner recesses of their souls. I drank until I was intoxicated. And I forgot the presence of the old woman who was not allowed near other persons, but must sit only on the bank of a remote stream, to bathe her shrunken limbs, and pray that the intervention of God might cure her of her ills.



LAST OF THE TEMPERATE ZONE
A Noontday Camp

GRINGO, JAP AND BODYGUARD
Into the Tropics

*Adventure, I Have Learned,
Is a Delightful Mistress Without Mercy . . .*

CHAPTER VIII

ADVENTURE, I have learned, is a delightful mistress without mercy—and without a price. One can not buy her favors; occasionally it is difficult to be rid of them. If you desire, you may court her. Then, probably, she will retire behind closed windows and wink at you through the shutters. When you have thrust her from your mind, she will leap upon your lap, to smother you with caresses.

After the fair temptress does grant you her charms, there is no material scale to determine which moment in her arms gave you the greatest joy. Perhaps you prepare yourself for Adventure. You deliberately make yourself ready for the delicious encounter. Nine times out of ten, the whole thing evolves into just another escapade. The fleeting, unannounced visit of the charmer, it seems, brings greatest bliss and fastens itself more lastingly to the memory of him who receives her.

True adventure, I suppose, like a popular conception of true love, is the kind that is fallen into without pre-meditation. You are young; adventure is partial to youth. You are carelessly happy; living seems adventure enough. Then suddenly, breathlessly, you drop into the quicksands of danger. You fight, with the desperation of fear, for your safety, or for the safety of your

friend. The reward is victory or death. Victory brings the supreme caress of true adventure.

It literally was quicksand Bob and I dropped into, the morning we left Hermanas. And Adventure's kiss left us breathless the remainder of the day. Every detail of those brief moments of danger is branded into my memory.

The hot baths had soaked the dust of the northern desert from our tired bodies. We had slept on beds. We had eaten food prepared by a woman's hands.

We were at peace with all creation. I had a whole fried chicken, wrapped in oiled paper, tucked snuggly inside my shirt, against my body. Bob had a bunch of grapes inside the crown of his hat. The German's illusion concerning our business in the country had made him play the more generous host. Bringing the gifts while we saddled, he wished us luck in our venture, and again fluttered his eyelid in the gesture of one who knows a great secret.

The sun still had not dispersed the cool of morning. Our horses, refreshed by a night in green pastures, stepped briskly toward Monclova.

Then we arrived at the River Aura, and the embrace of Miss Adventure burst the bubble of our contentment.

The river was dry, except for a single narrow stream, still warm, running down from the hot springs. Grass and reeds formed a smooth carpet down to the ribbon of water, only a few inches deep and a bare five feet across.

The nervous young mustang, Pistole, and I were in the lead. Bob, on the more placid and more plodding Negra, was trailing along, whistling "St. Louis Blues."

Pistole walked out on the carpet of grass and reeds, lowered his nose to the stream and leaped back, almost losing me over his head—and completely awakening me from the day dreams into which I had lapsed.

I touched the horse with my spurs and he edged fearfully toward the stream. Again he lowered his nose, and again jumped back, his forefeet pawing the air. I looked up and down the river. We were at the most likely place to cross. The stream was narrow, both banks were clad with solid mats of thick vegetation, and only that miniature barrier of water was holding us back.

"Kick him out. He can jump it," Bob advised.

I "kicked him out," to no avail. We backed off and got a running start. At the water's edge I tried to "lift" him over. But Pistole planted his feet so suddenly and so firmly, I found myself far up on his neck.

I resorted to the quirt and the spurs. I ran that horse up and down the banks of the Río Aura until both he and I were near exhaustion. Still he refused to jump.

Convinced that Pistole had affected some of the stubbornness of the absent Chiquita, I asked Bob to take Negra across, and "maybe this locoed young hellion will follow him." But the ever dependable Negra also balked. He would not step into the stream, nor would he jump.

We were losing time. There was no indication we ever would continue the trip if we were to stand there all day on the bank of the river. The sun was getting higher in the sky. And with it climbed my Irish temper.

Negra and Bob were poised on the very edge of the water hazard which blocked our progress. Bob was

poking gingerly with his spurs, and Negra was attempting to turn back.

"Let me at 'im," I shouted, and, dashing forward on Pistole, I planted a boot against Negra's broad rump, lashed him sharply with the end of a knotted rope and pushed him into the stream.

In less time than a normal heart beat, Negra was wallowing helplessly in the quicksand and I was dragging Bob onto a firm spot, cursing my own lack of patience, and praying for strength.

The suck of my companion's boots, as I helped him up out of the mire, stirred up dank, musty smells which must have warned the horses, but which we had not perceived before.

Long streams of gray ooze dripped from Bob's clothing, and he lay on the grass a moment, to recapture his breath. When I knew he was safe I turned to Negra.

Had the horse been human, and as witless as we, he would have said, "I told you so." Being an animal, and finding his strength insufficient to drag him from the mire, he only could lie there and look up at us with eyes eloquent in their appeal. No part of him except his head and neck, and the saddle on his back remained above the evil-smelling slime into which I had pushed him. I noticed, with thanksgiving, that he seemed to have ceased sinking.

Feverishly we set about freeing him. Bob lifted his head and pulled forward on the reins. I thrust a sharpened stick under the soft mud and attempted to prod him into fighting his way out. He lashed about feebly, his nostrils distended, his breath snarling through the

rising clouds of vapor. His limbs seemed caught in immovable traps. He sank back helplessly, and his large, black eyes again stared up at us. The muscles in Bob's usually expressionless face were twitching.

I reached Pistole's back in one leap, untied my rope and threw the loop to Bob. "Put that around the saddle horn, lift up on his head and, when I pull, you pull." I tried to suppress the fear that persisted in creeping into my voice.

Fastening one end of the rope about my own saddle horn, I hoped the mustang would add his strength to ours, in an effort to relieve his trail mate. But Pistole was only a three-year-old, I expected too much.

The rope pulled taut once. Bob lifted up on Negra's head, Negra reared, tearing his forefeet free and lashing desperately at the mire. Pistole leaned against the lariat and dragged him forward a few inches. Then things happened with a suddenness that defied analysis.

The young horse was up on his hind legs, spinning. The rope, tightly stretched from my saddle horn to the saddle of the animal struggling in the quicksand, was wrapping around my body, choking my breath away. Like the coils of a snake, it whipped sinuously and surely, each turn squeezing tighter. Around and around we spun. I felt as if I were in the vortex of a powerful whirlpool, being drawn down, steadily down.

There was a throbbing pain where my abdomen should have been. Curses exploded from my lips.

For a flash my mind became clear, and the entire situation was etched on my consciousness with a dia-

mond point. I drew sharply back on the reins and, utilizing the weight of my body and the tension of the rope, I threw my horse and myself to the ground.

There was a sodden thud. I felt the cool, damp grass on my face,—and the fried chicken mashed against my ribs, inside my shirt. Then it was dark, except for the tiny pinwheels of light which led me back toward the sun.

I followed them one by one, slowly, painfully,—year after year, it seemed, until a lifetime had elapsed. I looked up into Bob's face, and he was begging me, and all his Nipponese gods, not to leave him alone.

It must have happened in just a few seconds. Negra still was resting in the position in which I last had seen him, and Pistole was picking himself up from the grass, when I revived. But there was more primitive action, more conflicting sentiments, more mingling of prayers and curses in that brief encounter than Adventure ever before had revealed to me in the several years I had courted her.

Driven by fear and endowed with strength that comes only at a time of unusual mental and physical stimulation, we burrowed our arms down through the quicksand, unbuckled Negra's heavy saddle and, pushing and pulling, inch by laborious inch, helped him to the bank.

Covered with gray, evil-smelling slime, he clambered up and stood on the grassy bank, head hanging, limbs trembling.

After resting a few minutes we turned downstream

to find a bridge, many kilometers out of our way, and resumed our journey to Monclova.

Again we looked out over the flat desert. The mountains to the east were dusky blue, those to the west orchid. The dirty gray muck clung to our clothes and to the saddles and horses.

"Well, you blankety-blank yellow peril," I addressed Bob, affectionately, "it looks like your heathen gods were with you coming out of that quicksand."

He grinned. "You were calling on yours, Mick, when your horse started spinning."

*Out of the Quicksand,
Into the Domain of Lady Luck . . .*

CHAPTER IX

OUT of the quicksand, into the domain of Lady Luck, the horses bore us.

Dripping for awhile, then cracking at the joints when the heat turned the gray slime of the mire into cement-like armor, Bob and I pushed our exhausted mounts toward Monclova. The sun was high in the sky, and climbing. Flies were nearer the earth but equally as merciless as the sun. Our bodies were bruised and tired. Silently we followed the twin trails of a spur line of the *Ferrocarriles Nacionales de Mexico*, the Mexican National Railway, through a deserted land.

The first water tank on the railroad invited us, after hours of drinking greedily from blood-warm canteens, to rest and refresh ourselves, and partake of the food we had brought from Hermanas.

We had neighbors under the cottonwoods at the water tank. There were a horse breeder, a man of seeming importance, in that he wore "store bought" shoes, and a *mestizo*, half-caste, who owned a sprightly young mare.

"*¿De dónde vienen?*" they asked, and "*¿adónde van?*"—"Where are you coming from, and where are you going?"

"From the border and to Monclova."

After they had learned as much of our history and our business as we cared to divulge, the mestizo shuffled away to his *casa* and a bowl of beans. The horse breeder was far from home, he said, and he had failed to provide himself with a lunch. Who were we, we reasoned, also travelers a great distance from our own firesides, to deny a brother our hospitality?

The battered remains of the fried chicken so graciously prepared by the señora at Hermanas, and the bunch of grapes from her garden, were spread down on a square of canvas once used to cover Chiquita's pack. Our two rusty tin cups were dug from the maleta. I drank from the canteen, that our guest might have a cup.

Sharing our mite with the horse breeder was nothing more than we would have done for any other wayfarer under similar circumstances, yet it proved to be an unconscious pandering to fate that made our entire trip through Mexico more pleasant.

We had planned to stop at the Hotel America in Monclova. The Texan at Sabinas had recommended it, and, moreover, we liked the sound of the name. But our companion at the water tank, picking the shattered bone from a leg of the fowl which broke my fall on the bank of the River Aura, insisted we visit the home of a friend of his.

"I will give you a letter of introduction," he said.

"But no, señor. It is too much. We can not accept. But we are greatly indebted to you for your thoughtfulness." Bob placed all his diplomatic courtesy and tact into the refusal. I think we both recalled some of the

greasy, dirt floors we had slept upon, and the filth and squalor that is seen in many of the *jacales* of northern Mexico. The night at Hermanas had spoiled us.

Our friend was insistent. "At least you will stop and give him my regards, and allow him to care for your horses." With a vague feeling of being robbed of something, we acquiesced—with mental reservations.

"El Señor Basque Treviño is a cultured gentleman, and a man of heart and soul. He is *muy grandioso*," the horse breeder declared.

Later we learned that he had not exaggerated. In fact, before leaving Monclova, we arrived at the mutual decision that never an oracle spoke truer words.

If ever there was a more noble example of the glory that once was Spain's; if ever man was endowed more fully with the spirit of hospitality and understanding of the trials of a traveler; if ever there was a person of broader mind and deeper sympathy than Señor Ramón Basque Treviño, historians have perpetrated a most heinous injustice in not heralding him. This we resolved after an evening in Señor Treviño's garden, a night under his roof, morning with his family and friends, and weeks in the aura of his influence.

*The Calm of a Sabbath Afternoon
Welcomed Us to Monclova.*

CHAPTER X

THE calm of a Sabbath afternoon welcomed us to Monclova. The sun, which had kept up a ceaseless bombardment all during the day, was swinging low above the mountains, and its now more gentle rays played over us in manner so soothing we only had mind to drift along, humming slow music to the rhythm of slowly treading horses' hoofs. Curious-eyed children, and old folk with black rebozos over their heads, greeted us from before the open doorways of their adobe huts.

A youth, wearing unaccustomed shoes and a stringy, black tie, rode up on a bay mare. We asked the way to the home of Señor Basque Treviño. It was in the same street along which we were riding, he said. With a glance at the colorless, mud houses at each side of us, I renewed my original intention of going to the Hotel America.

"Follow this *calle*," the youth directed, as he stopped before the home of his sweetheart, "until you reach the second plaza. There a street car track begins. Go directly across the plaza and into the street leading south. One square farther is the casa of Señor Treviño."

"Adiós." We drifted on.

The second plaza did not appear promising. There were the usual hitching posts, a saloon on one corner, a

church, several *tiendas*—general merchandise stores,—and the carline, over which ran an ancient trolley, pitching and tossing like the animals on a merry-go-round.

Houses in the street leading south, also, were little different from those we had passed for the last hour or more. They all were featureless white and gray fronts shouldered together almost to the roadway. They revealed plain wooden doors, or no doors at all. Men sat on the thresholds, smoking cigarettes. Behind them might be seen stretches of damp, earthen floors. Through the iron grill of the single windows flashed dirt walls hung with red and green calendars, cupid dolls of painted plaster of paris, and bright prints of the Virgin of Guadalupe, Mexico's patroness.

Presently, however, we came to a brightly blossoming park set down in the midst of crowded adobes. It was almost the length of a block, and its depth was lost in trees and flowers.

A low, stone fence with grill-work along the top, shut it off from the street. There were vines over the grill, and a narrow gate opened on a path leading to the flower-covered porch of a modern bungalow. Other houses were visible through the trees.

As we stood admiring this oasis in the desert of baked huts that surrounded it, a woman came out of a doorway, across the street. "Where is the home of Señor Basque Treviño?" Bob asked.

"It is there," she answered, pointing to the vine-covered bungalow.

Bob looked at me, and smiled. "Maybe we were wrong," he said.

While I held the horses, my companion scraped some of the gray from the River Aura off his boots, gave his hair a hasty rake with his fingers, and walked up to the door of the house, hat in hand. A moment later he was back. "The señor was taking his siesta," he said. "But he is getting right up to greet us."

We did not wait long before Señor Treviño was welcoming us to the shelter of his roof. Friendliness and sincerity shone in his eyes. His handclasp was that of an honest man and a man of strong character. His skin was fair as a Nordic and his hair was streaked with gray, but he was a shade less than medium in height, and his manners marked him a Spaniard.

His clothing was neat and in good taste. His language combined the fluency of the Grandees and a convincing cordiality that is individual.

Here, I thought, we are to learn something of the men who colonized Mexico, four hundred years ago. Here we are to observe a family which, although not typically Mexican, is part of an element which prevents Mexico from reverting to savagery. It is such as these, from which come artists, authors, surgeons, educators, lawyers and—in times of rationalism—rulers.

Our host, we were to learn later, was a judge, his brother was national minister of agriculture and commerce, and his family owned ranches dating from Spanish land grants. His son was studying to follow the profession of his father.

After introducing himself and asking about the

health of his friend, the ranchero who had sent us to him, Señor Treviño called an Indian boy to care for our horses. The packs and canteens were taken by another servant.

Our morning's exertions in the quicksand, and the long, hot trip from Hermanas had left us tired and dirty. The señor asked us if we desired a bath. We did. A woman brought towels and soap, and led us to a bathhouse under the trees. The house was a single room built of cement, through which flowed a clear stream, from one of a system of irrigation ditches that watered the estate.

By closing the drain where the stream ran out of the house, the water was made to rise to a person's waist. Warmed in its rambles about the garden, by the sun, it provided a refreshing bath.

Señor Treviño met us and walked with us to the *casa grande*, the "big house," where we were presented to his wife, a large, motherly woman, hair completely white, eyes still young, manners purely Castilian.

In another house among the trees, a piano was playing and young voices were singing. "That is the music room," our host explained. "The children spend much of their time there." He and his wife led us to still another *casita*, surrounded by flowers and shrubs, where, over strange dishes served in courses by two *mozas*, we described our journey into Mexico, and our impressions of the country and its people.

Three pretty señoritas joined us at coffee, and were introduced as "our daughters." Theirs was the music we had heard. The son, a handsome, fair skinned, black

haired youth of about seventeen years, arrived later. He was a student at the college in Saltillo, and was at home on vacation. He was eager for knowledge of the United States, and asked many questions concerning its schools.

After dinner, we sat in the garden, and felt ourselves a part of an intensely satisfying family circle.

The señor was surprised, and expressed deep concern, at our passing through the republic unarmed. He sent a servant to the home of the local police chief, and requested the officer to bring us a pistol, a .32 caliber automatic. "You may mail it back to me when you reach the capital," he said.

We talked long, beneath a moon that seemed tangled in the boughs above our heads. We lingered over slices of cold melon. A gentle breeze sprang up. Suddenly I realized I was tired. Our host showed us to a room, and we lay down on crisp, white sheets in twin beds.

Outside the grill of our window ran the vine-clad wall. In its shadows, where the moon could not reach, one of the Indian serving girls was standing. Her lover was on the other side of the leafy barrier, his hands thrust through.

I fell asleep with the sweet, sibilant sounds of Mexican "nothings" in my ears.

We were awakened by the sun. We went out to breakfast with Señor Treviño and his wife, at a table set under the trees. The three girls, fresh as the morning air and fragrant as the opening blossoms, came out and

talked to us while we ate. Their eyes and complexions revealed they had arisen much earlier than we.

Our horses, well fed, washed and groomed, their saddles polished and packs neatly tied in place, were waiting at the curb, held by an old Indian with a meager gray beard. We walked out to them, and a crowd gathered to see us off. A mozo came running, bringing two umbrella-brimmed straw sombreros and strings with which to fasten them under our chins. The hats were gifts of farewell from our host. The señoritas, laughing merrily, stepped forward and offered hairpins, from their own hair, to fasten the chin ties to the sombreros. A servant girl brought us a lunch.

The chief of police was there, and a retired colonel of the old Federal army. Señor Treviño asked if we would accompany him to the city. Our horses, he said, would be sent ahead to meet us there. After many farewells and much handshaking, we walked away in the company of our host, the colonel and the police official.

There is a hill protruding up between the residential and business sections of Monclova. On top of this hill, as on thousands of others in Mexico, there stands a church. Religion, like superstition, is woven into the warp of every Mexican's mind. It is not put on and off like a cloak. It is as indispensable as the air he breathes. Every town and every ranch has its church or churches; tiny chapels mark every roadway and path; crosses point skyward atop every high place.

We entered the little cathedral on the hill,—a soldier, a peace officer, a judge, my Japanese companion and I. But the rest of us stood at the back while Señor Treviño,

his fine old head bare and bowed, walked to the altar and knelt to pray, asking safe passage and protection for my friend and me, representatives of a people that long has spoken of his people as "damned greasers."

*Señor Treviño's Hospitality . . . Was Not to End
With an Afternoon and Night in His Home.*

CHAPTER XI

Señor Treviño's hospitality, we learned, was not to end with an afternoon and night in his home. It went with us as we left Monclova. It gained, for us, a score of nights' shelter under good, substantial roofs. It welcomed us to Saltillo. It took us to the village of El Niño Fidencio, the healer, "beloved of God." Almost a month after we left Monclova it was destined, through the humble medium of the pistol he gave us, to save our property, possibly our lives.

After leaving the church on the hill, we trooped down to Señor Treviño's office, near the principal plaza of the city. There we were introduced to Señor de la Fuente, at whose ranch, San Lorenzo, we were invited to stop for the night.

While the judge attended a brief conference, we went out for refreshments with the colonel and the chief of police. The drinks were served on small, round tables in the open plaza. We, from the United States, ordered beer. Our friends, the soldier and the peace officer, drank lemonade.

Señor Treviño, himself, went with us to the office of the *presidente municipal*, the mayor. He dictated a letter to the mayor's secretary, asking all with whom we came

in contact, to afford us the courtesy of their hospitality. The mayor, a distinguished appearing young man, signed the letter, gave us his blessing and wished us success.

The sun was high. The plaza was filled with shoppers, a few small automobiles jostled over the narrow, bricked streets; horses and burros were tethered to every available post and tree. The entire city seemed abustle with movement and sound. Had we been dropped into Monclova from a passing airplane, a few hours after leaving even a small town in the United States, we probably would have been startled at the quiet, lazy placidity of the place. But we had been in the desert ten days—and ten peaceful nights. Our ears had learned to listen for the sounds of the wastelands: The whir of the rattle-snake, the bark of the coyote, the softly beating wings of *la Golondrina*. Our eyes were accustomed to the slow progress of burro's feet or the *gauraches* of the Indians, the dance of the desert wind through the ocatilla and mesquite, and the slow path of the flaming chariot of the sky.

Every passing automobile in Monclova seemed a terrible machine of devastating speed; we were bewildered at the throngs of hurrying persons, the busy shopkeepers, the peddlers' bells and the blatant squawks of motor horns.

Bob glanced at his watch, nervously. "It is ten o'clock. Señores, with your permission, we must depart."

Señor Treviño, the colonel, Señor de la Fuente and the police chief walked with us to the horses. Señor de la Fuente gave us a letter to the majordomo at his ranch.

He also gave Bob a bottle of *mescal*, an intoxicating liquor made by distilling the juice of the maguey plant, to use in treating a boil on Negra's back.

"You must stop and see El Niño, the healer," Señor Treviño said. "Many people from all over the world come to see him. They say he is a second Christ. His foster father has a small boy, and the child calls the man-healer 'mama'." The gray-haired old judge laughed. "You will find him at Espinazo. It is two days from here, *a caballo*—on horseback."

"You must not forget to stop at my ranch tonight," Señor de la Fuente said. The horse breeder who directed us to the Treviño home was his brother.

"I wish for you a safe passage," said the chief of police.

"It is a long trip, and a hard one, to the capital," said the colonel. "But you are men. Go with God." There was pathos in his voice, defeat in his eyes. He is not of the party in power.

We shook every outstretched hand, and felt the aggressive grip of sincerity.

"When you reach Saltillo, stop and visit the governor," Señor Treviño said. "He will welcome you. He is a powerful man."

We thanked them all, and swung into the saddle. I think we both were reluctant to leave. I felt as if we were departing from home and there would be no returning.

"Señores, remember, my house is yours. Go with God." The words of the old judge lingered in my ears.

At the crest of a knoll where the trail started dipping

away through fields of maize and wide, rolling spaces of grazing land, we turned and looked back at the pueblo, a poem of color flashing white, red, pale yellow and pink in the sun. In its center was a hill, a green hill, on which stood, silent and substantial, the cathedral. "Adiós," I murmured under my breath, and we turned silently southward.

That night we slept under the stars at the Rancho San Lorenzo. The children of the peons gathered to watch the curious antics of the Americanos, and they shouted gleefully when we washed our teeth and the mysterious white foam fell from our lips.

The second night found us camped in the brush near the village of Bajan. From there we rode all day to arrive at the hacienda-hospital of El Niño, the healer, "beloved of God."

*Down Where the Village of Espinazo Sits
In the Bend . . .*

CHAPTER XII

Down where the village of Espinazo sits in the bend of a blunt elbow of the state of Nuevo Leon, the pious natives no longer await the Christ of the padres' Bible. Their Christ has come.

To them Fidencio S. Constantine, known throughout Mexico as El Niño—The Child—is a son of God, whose touch cures all ills and whose blessing routs all sin.

For the last five years, stories of the power of the healer of Espinazo have been recounted in jacal and casa grande in all parts of the republic. At the time of our visit El Niño was thirty years old, and the master of a primitive sanitarium and hospital within the walls and about the premises of which were housed lepers, lunatics, the ulcerous and the lame; syphilitics, paralytics, consumptives; the deaf, the dumb and the blind.

All ailments, from all sections of Mexico, are brought before El Niño. Many persons have come from the United States and even from Spain, the villagers relate.

Spanish doctors from El Paso and San Antonio; governors and great land owners; a caravan of Indians from Oklahoma, driving long, sand colored automobiles; negroes and Creoles from New Orleans; Mayans from Yucatan; and rich ranchers from the South American

pampas are said to have come, seeking the crude ministrations of El Niño.

Former Presidents Calles and Ortiz Rubio are among the notables who have made the pilgrimage to Espinazo, the natives recall.

Fidencio's methods of healing are primitive ones. But, according to those who have felt his "miraculous" touch, they are effective. Gifts from many of his former patients indicate satisfaction in the results of his treatments.

His medicines all are taken from the same pot, in which are simmering aromatic leaves and pungent roots from desert plants. His surgical instruments—and he often performs operations—are splinters of razor-edged glass from broken wine bottles!

Without anaesthetics or drugs, he makes incisions in human abdomens to remove diseased parts—and his patients live.

"I know nothing of surgery," he told us. "I do only that which God tells me. A man comes to my house. He is ill. He tells me where is his pain. The voice of God advises me what I must do to cure him. God talks to me all the time. I do not remember when first he appeared to me. That was long ago, but now he talks to me every day." The restless eyes of the healer move about over the crowd of followers awaiting his blessing.

It is a problem to gain an interview with El Niño. All day he is busy giving out potions of herb juices, swinging the mutes in sisal swings, ducking the insane in cold water, performing major operations with bits of

broken glass, making tiny adobe heads of the Virgin to be worn as charms by lepers.

When his workday is over, one of his assistants goes to the housetop and calls the people of the village and hospital to a nightly fiesta.

It was about three o'clock in the morning, at the close of the fiesta, when we obtained a few minutes with El Niño. I looked into the fathomless black eyes of the man, and was baffled. "Is he insane, or is he on that inner rim of insanity which is called genius?" I asked myself. He is sincere, I decided. He truly thinks he is endowed with the powers of a savior of bodies and souls.

On the wall above his head hung a painting of Christ. Beside it, in a similar frame, was a photograph of El Niño, himself.

The Child would not talk directly to us. He called a young woman whose mother, he said, was English, and who understood that language, to act as interpreter. "I have been in his household four years," she said. "Always before, I was ill. Now I am well. He is great. He is good. He is beloved of God." She spoke to El Niño in Spanish, "these men are *periodistas* (newspapermen) from the United States of the North."

"You are not Americano?" he asked Bob.

"I am Japanese."

"I knew."

He looked at me slowly, and for a long time. There was a two weeks' growth of beard on my face. I was wearing a blue shirt and denim breeches thrust into cowboy boots. My skin was dusty brown from the trip

across the northern desert. "You appear like an Andalusian," he said quickly, in a low voice.

"Have you been to Spain?"

The woman answered: "He has been all over the world. Perhaps now his spirit is hovering above the *pueblos* of the border, or returning from across the ocean. He does not travel as ordinary human beings do. His body remains here; his soul accompanies the flying bird."

She extended her hand to show a ring. "This he brought me from El Paso."

There was a circle of patients around us. El Niño spoke to a woman and child standing at his elbow. The woman held the child in her arms. The healer put the ends of his thumbs in his mouth, withdrew them and rubbed their wet surfaces over the baby's eyelids. The woman went happily away to her hovel on the hillside, below the hospital.

"The gentlemen ask when you eat and when you sleep," Bob's question was interpreted. "He says he never eats nor sleeps. He drinks much water. God gives him strength."

El Niño is six feet, three inches tall and weighs one hundred and eighty pounds. His body never is still. He moves with the quickness and agility of a panther. In the fiesta he sings and dances like a madman. He says he never eats nor sleeps.

The fiesta, he says, is part of his cure. His patients forget their troubles during the hours of merrymaking. We attended the one just preceding our interview.

After the announcer shouts from the housetops that

the hour of the fiesta has arrived, the inhabitants of the village and the inmates of the sanitarium gather in the assembly hall, on wooden benches. Sputtering lights distort the scene.

In a corner on the dirt floor an Indian woman lay asleep, one ulcerous breast hanging from the open front of her dress. Her baby chewed a greasy bone.

A palsied mestizo, the pupils of his colorless eyes staring in opposite directions and his arms drawn helplessly against his quivering body, shuffled about begging alms, "*por Dios.*"

A wealthy citizen of Saltillo, one leg bound in white rags up to the knee, sat beside a dusty, little Indian in "pyjamas" and *gauraches*. The Indian looked always at the floor. Two growths protruded from the back of his neck and forced his head forward.

A woman of the household stood near the door, ironing white robes for the master.

Señoritas in flowered dresses and bright rebozos, moved about outside, carefully chaperoned by white-haired duennas in dignified blacks and grays.

A vivacious young woman with rouged cheeks and deep, shadowed eyes, whirled through the crowd. Every tap of her pointed heels transferred itself to subtle whispers of vibrations that quivered along her full breasts. "That is El Niño's cousin from Monterrey. She will dance in the fiesta." The speaker, both arms paralyzed, grinned at me and edged closer along the bench we both occupied.

Everything became silent. "El Niño is coming." My

neighbor whispered it and it rippled through the crowd in a low undertone.

The master appeared, walking through the center aisle, eyes looking only to the front. A man on a straw mat grabbed at his skirts. He pushed him away with a bare, brown foot. The palsied beggar fell to his knees and clutched at the healer's hand. The healer stepped aside and continued to the stage at the end of the hall. The crowd rushed about him. He spoke to the director of an orchestra of children.

The cousin from Monterrey leaped through, placed her arms about his shoulders and attempted to kiss him on the mouth. He pushed her away and gave her his hand, still moist from the drooling lips of the beggar. She kissed it and held it tightly to her bosom.

The music started. Lights were lowered. Fidencio walked through the crowd, with a hat, collecting a few cents for the invalids, and giving his hand to be mouthed over.

The curtain rose. The music became louder. Three small boys and three small girls, dressed in charro suits and China poblanas, typical Mexican dress, appeared and went through the routine of native dances. The light was bad, the stage rocked with the weight of the performers, and the music flared in the simple movements and died completely on difficult runs. The children retired amid wild applause and loud laughter.

The healer made a dramatic entrance.

In his arms he carried a bundle of green leaves. The audience arose with a shout, and he threw the leaves among them. There was a mad scramble, screams of

triumph and a gradual return to order. Those who were successful in the struggle were assured that by boiling their leaves they might produce a healing potion that would relieve them of all suffering.

The performance was resumed. The healer acted the clown. He danced and sang. He twisted vigorously, like an African witch doctor. In a running patter of jokes, he ridiculed the politician, the soldier and the Americano. He whacked parts of his body with the flat of his hand. The crowd laughed. He was joined by his cousin from Monterrey, who danced the Charleston, shaking her head and jerking her lower torso in awkward circles.

This continued through a dozen acts, the procedure changing only in costumes and jokes. My neighbor assured me there were no rehearsals. "God directs them on the stage," he said. "He tells them what to do to make people happy."

Long hours later this madness ran itself out and the audience disbanded. Some of the patients lay down on the floor of the fiesta hall and quietly went to sleep on the hard-pressed earth.

We pushed our way through to the stage.

El Niño, his body and face bathed in perspiration, was gulping down glass after glass of water. The man who shared our bench during the fiesta introduced us. I grasped the healer's hand and shook it vigorously. He looked down. He seemed puzzled, and his fingers were limp. His followers gasped and edged closer. I wondered if this was the first time anyone ever presumed to

stare into the eyes and grip the hand of The Child.

With the aid of the woman who understood English, we spoke awhile together. Bob and I started to leave. He called us back. "My house is yours. You will stay here tonight?" I looked at the misery around me, and shuddered inwardly.

Bob made our excuses. "Thank you kindly, señor, but we have rented a casa down the hill. Our horses and baggage are there. We must ask to be excused. You are very kind."

"Then you will return here for breakfast? My servants will have it ready at nine."

"We are very tired. If we awaken late we must hurry on toward Saltillo. If we awaken early we will come here before we leave."

Repeating "good nights" and "*basta mañanas*," we stepped out into the cool night air that blew away the rivulets of perspiration caused by the heat of the fiesta lights and the proximity of closely huddled bodies. I breathed deeply and spat the taste of the place out of my mouth.

We walked down the hill to our house, a single-room hut built of packing cases and set on the hard-packed earth.

But first we stopped at the village pump to wash ourselves and to take turn laughing, each at the other, for the industry with which we scrubbed our hands and faces, and the diligence with which we went about gargling. I poured bucketsful of water over my head, and let it run down under my clothing. But I could not lose the sensation of nameless diseases crawling about

my fatigued body, like thorns of cactus brushed slowly across raw, uncovered flesh.

We made pillows of our saddles, threw saddle blankets on the dusty floor and fell down upon them, too exhausted even to remove our boots. The heat in the tiny cube of a room was intense. Perspiration again saturated my clothing. Sweltering, I fell asleep, thinking this *casita* we had rented must have been built to house a former overflow of the afflicted at the hospital of the healer.

Somewhere along the narrow, unlighted path that ran between the row of temporary shelters there was a hut in which lay a dead person. The throb of guitars and men's voices, singing the death chant, projected itself into my dreams.

The sun, like a cauldron of melted metal, burned through the roof and awakened us. It was ten minutes until nine o'clock.

Hastily we packed, and went to feed the horses. While they ate, we bought food at a *fondita*.

"You are the señores who grasped the hand of El Niño?" asked the fat old woman who waited on us at the inn. "I thought you were to have breakfast with him. The women have prepared a meal for you."

"Yes, we know. We are very sorry. Please give him our regrets and explain that we already are late at Saltillo. We must hurry along."

"But there is no necessity for me to tell him. He knows everything. Even now he knows you are leaving the village." We gulped our food, tossed the woman a

coin and ran to the corral where the horses were eating.

Two minutes later we were in the saddle, and quitting that place that seemed covered with the pall of the unseen, unearthly things.

A man called to us at the edge of the village. "Señores, señores, El Niño wishes to speak with you." We turned back. The woman who had acted as the healer's interpreter was close on his heels. "But, señores, you must return. He awaits you. And the breakfast we have prepare, it is cold."

Slowly we followed the long climb up the hill, explaining we had awakened late, and we must hurry. We could not stop for breakfast.

Back of the Constantine ranchhouse the desert stretches out to a horizon unbroken except by wavering heat lines. There, in a round, thatch-covered booth, we found El Niño, clothed in a crisp white robe. Far out into the desert, under the burning sun, curved a line of ragged, crippled, weeping, shouting, singing human things, waiting to pass before The Child and receive their cup of herbs and a blessing from the master's lips.

We swung from the saddles.

El Niño left his work and approached timidly. "You were not here, señores."

We mumbled excuses. Uncertainly he extended his hand. We both, in turn, gripped it firmly, and thanked him for his kindnesses. "Go with God," said The Child.

"Go with God." We cantered away down the hill. Everywhere, I could feel the eyes of trusting, superstitious, pious, believing beings fastened upon us.

The inn keeper called out as we passed: "You see,

he knows everything. He knew you were leaving. He sent for you. Now do you believe?" I laughed, and kept on into the desert.

I did not laugh, however, when a feeble old man ran after us and clung to my leg, begging a blessing from the señor who clasped hands with El Niño.

I patted his head, gave him a coin and told him to go with God.

*Impenetrable Darkness Defeated Us
In a Race to Empalme Paradon . . .*

CHAPTER XIII

IMPENETRABLE darkness defeated us in a race to Empalme Paradon,—darkness that hid the canyons, when aided by distance, and increased the deadly possibility of a slip or false step, in descending and ascending their almost perpendicular walls. Had we known the nature of the country, we never would have left Anhelo with night so near upon us.

There was no road from Anhelo to Empalme Paradon, only a precarious path worn deep and smooth by the hoofs of donkeys and the bare feet of the Indians. This path led us into the dusk and, finally, into the vast, oppressive blackness of a starless night that squeezed in about the feeble lights of the village, leaving us blind and helpless, dependent on the sure-footedness of our horses as they slid into seemingly bottomless crevasses, and clambered wearily upward again.

With constant uncertainty of what the next forward move might bring, we labored six kilometers through a maze of invisible chasms separated by intervals of deceitfully smooth, unbroken plains.

We had come eight leagues from Espinazo. The long vigil at the hospital of El Niño the preceding night, had accumulated fatigue that five hours' sleep had been unable to eliminate. Only the temptation of more com-

fortable accommodations at Empalme prevented us stopping that evening at Anhelo.

The sun already was high when we took leave of the healer of Espinazo and rode into a flat, plantless inferno tilted on edge, its upper portion rising in the south, to meet the mountains. The trail led out of the elbow of Nuevo Leon, back into Coahuila. Sol drove his pitiless shafts into us, and the earth rose steadily toward the blue-steel sky. It was burned, lifeless earth, and the water in the canteens was hot as if with fire, but we drank often and greedily, and our bodies were glad.

The edge of the tilting plain was caught in the crags of the sierras, and amidst the crags we were lifted suddenly into the village of Reata, hidden in a shallow bowl close to the clouds.

The climb to Reata had been the most discouraging stretch of the entire journey. Lack of sleep, intense heat, clouds of thick, sullen dust and stinging insects, and white, blinding sand, spotted occasionally with piles of bleached bones and gray boulders, joined the toil of rising altitude in a spirited attack on our determination to ride to the capital. We were near to defeat. We even discussed paying an Indian to bring the horses to Saltillo while we took a train and went on ahead, to rest a few days before resuming the trip.

But we only discussed it. I was too stubborn to make the initial admission, although, I admit, I was sorely tempted. Of course, Bob would not allow the Irish to outdo the Japanese. So, when neither of us would say, "Well, let's chuck it and ride on the train," the conference was closed, our horses were fed in the station mas-

ter's corral and we went looking for our midday meal.

We scooped up cooked tomatoes with eggs and chili, using folded pieces of tortilla for spoons. We ate on the earthen floor of a jacal, with tin plates between our outstretched legs, and perspiration washing the dust from our faces, and running in sticky streams from our fingers. Nothing more was said about discontinuing the trip. I said nothing during the meal. I was afraid my tone would betray my disappointment.

Again we went up into the mountains where the flaming disk of the heavens was drawing nearer the blistered earth. Up and down, like the carved figures in the Swiss Village at a street carnival, we passed over stony crag, up hill, across ravine, through valley. When the cycle was completed it began again, and again. Almost imperceptibly, the sun picked its way westward.

From the top of the ragged sierra we saw the white of Empalme Paradon flash in the slanting rays. The town was far away in a mountain valley, the end of which was lost in purple, orange and gray shadows where the mountains closed in again many leagues to the south.

Through towering masses of stone, along rough, crumbling ledges, down a narrow path,—where we must step aside to let pass a lean Indian, his dusky wife, astride a burro, and two children trailing along at the rear—we descended to the valley floor.

From Anhelo, under a sun we judged to be an hour before setting, the broad flat on which Empalme Paradon was built appeared white and hard and smooth with a smoothness that seemed almost artificial, like the beach at Daytona or the salt desert in Utah. There was no road

across it. No road would be needed, we decided, to traverse that great, natural plaza. But the canyons could not be seen from Anhelo. The distance and the fading light deceived us regarding the condition of the ground over which we were to pass.

I do not know the explanation of the earth formation at Empalme Paradon. The natives, themselves, were unable to explain it. I never have seen anything like it in the United States or elsewhere in Mexico. A translation of the name *Paradon*, if the names of towns might be translated, would be "wall" or "parapet." The *Empalme*, which means "connection," refers to the junction of two railroads.

But Empalme Paradon is no wall, nor parapet, unless the series of deep crevasses which shuts it in from the north, may be considered as constituting a natural barricade.

The plain on which the city is built is of hardened white mud, as if some sea suddenly had evaporated, leaving its empty bed for the comfort of man. Its surface, on which no vegetation grows, seems to have been laid yesterday, or last week.

But railroads cross it, and their rails are well-worn; the hoofs of countless burros have cut deep wrinkles in its face; and a score of canyons, ranging in depth from twenty to fifty feet, traverse it on the north side of the pueblo.

These canyons evidently have been cut by powerful periodic streams of water; no permanent stream flows through them. The erosion, however fresh the surface of the cuts appears, must have taken place over a wide

span of years, because expensive concrete trestles have been constructed to bear the trains across them.

Where the city stands, the calcium-filled mud seems thicker and more durable. The crevasses all turn aside where the streets begin.

We encountered the first of the canyons just before dark. We were almost on the brink before we realized there was a break in the plain at all. The burro trail we followed seemed to be the only place to cross, or, at least, the only place crossing had been done. The drop was almost perpendicular. A series of scratches zig-zagged down, showing where the hoofs of pack mules had made the descent by a dozen or more six-foot slides. The bottom of the trail was lost where dusk was brewing thickly.

We debated whether or not our horses would be able to find safe footing. Darkness was coming on, and Parandon was almost six kilometers away. We were too tired to look for an easier crossing, and I doubt if there was one.

Pistole stopped and lowered his head. I gave him the rein and touched him with my spurs. Nose to the trail, he plunged downward. He slid the first six or eight feet. I leaned far back in the saddle and braced my legs. There was an empty sensation in the pit of my stomach.

The horse paused before attempting the "zag" of the first "zig-zag." Again we slid. A shower of pebbles clattered to the floor of the canyon. Back of us, I heard Negra take the initial plunge. Down, down we dropped, by dizzy, jerky stages.

Then we must repeat the process upwards. Again I gave Pistole his head and again he hung it close to the trail, like a hunting dog. He reared up and planted his forefeet as high as they could reach. He scrambled up, held his position a moment, and reared again, like a monkey on a rope, I thought. I leaned forward on his back and held about his neck.

With great straining, heaving and creaking of saddle leather, we advanced, the massive Negra close on our tail.

I felt a brimming measure of mental relief as we paused after the ascent, to allow the horses a moment to breathe. But relief was short lived. We rode less than a hundred yards before a second canyon yawned at our feet.

I gave Pistole his head, and plunged trustingly into twilight, where the day already had departed. Again we slipped downward, and again scrambled out. The sun was gone, and night, black and starless, swirled silently in its wake. I dropped the reins over my horse's neck, clenched my teeth, and allowed him to select his own trail. There was a moment of breathless fear every time I felt his first plunge down, the slide and the rattle of pebbles on the canyon floor.

We continued on until nine o'clock, when we reached the town, dropping into wells of blackness; catching a breath at the bottom; clambering up a wall where a man on foot would have had difficulty; dropping, catching and clambering again.

Eight times we survived that nightmare of unseen

danger, made even more fearful by imagination freed of the material fetters imposed by sight perception.

We emerged from the final plunge into the valleys of the shadows, to find the lights of the village winking in our faces. The path over the mud plain was cut more deeply here, like a groove chiseled square, across a tablet of soft stone.

Ahead, we heard the soft slap of bare feet, drawing toward us. A sibilant, feminine "*buenas noches*" came from the dark, and the bare feet pattered by, their owner unseen.

We rounded a cluster of houses, through the windows of which might be seen dim lights and grotesque, moving shadows.

A street unfolded beneath us.

Over a wax taper, a storekeeper was figuring his day's accounts. We rode to the doorway. His hand closed over a revolver. Bob asked the way to an inn. Food was served at the railway station, he said. We rode there to dismount.

The horses were given an extra kilogram of maize, and turned in a corral with pigs, chickens and other barnyard residents, in an humble attempt to repay them for their loyalty and for the stout manner in which they brought us unscathed across the many pits of darkness.

While we were eating, the train thundered up from Monterrey and its passengers climbed down to take their meals, before completing the trip to Torreón. For the most part, they were natives who did not enter the

station restaurant. Several prosperous appearing hacendados entered, however, and were ushered, with great ceremony, to square, linen covered tables where the head waiter received their orders. A number of Americans and Englishmen strode in and sat down, demanding service in loud voices.

There was a detachment of soldiers, in faded green uniforms, "guarding" the train; the muzzles of their rifles were stopped with wooden plugs. A sergeant swaggered into the dining room, his cap on the back of his head, a pistol strapped low on his thigh. All the tables were taken, and we invited him to share ours. We learned that he was a friend of "Carranza" Castellano, from whom we had purchased our horses. The news dealer from the train entered, and we had him bring bottles of ice-cold beer, that we might drink a toast to our mutual acquaintance in Villa Acuña.

A party of men I judged to be Americans, sat at a table near ours. Their brows were deeply furrowed. They spoke earnestly and pounded the table with their fists. Their table manners were slovenly, they growled at the waiter, they bolted their food as no Mexican would do.

But they were dressed in clothing of standard cut and conservative coloring, and their appearances were those of respected members of any community in the United States. We decided they must be metal company officials from Monterrey.

"Bob," I asked, "do all Americans seem as ill-mannered to you, as those fellows?"

"I'm not making any incriminating statements," he answered. That was some more of his diplomacy.

After we had finished eating, I purposely put myself in the way of the Americans, to see if they would recognize me as a fellow countryman. They walked by or around me on the lighted platform a dozen times. Once they stopped near where Bob and I were leaning against a lamp post. "Allo," I said. They turned away without answering. I studied their faces. Obviously, if they noticed me at all, they saw no difference in me and the crowd of "greasers", of which I was a part.

Bob was watching my experiment, laughing quietly. "How does it feel, being snubbed by the high and mighty gringo?" he asked.

"After seeing them eat, I registered it a triumph, chief. It sure looks like we've gone native in a big way."

*We Returned
To the Timeless Sierra.*

CHAPTER XIV

WE returned to the timeless sierra. Human companionship, over the brimming bowl, and a long night of unbroken slumber had driven away depression and fatigue. Saltillo was only two days' journey to the south.

We planned to rest awhile at Saltillo. It would be the first city of any size we had visited in Mexico. There would be green foods, in variety; there would be wine, both *tinto* and *blanco*; and there would be soft beds, and no reason for arising at dawn.

The climb was resumed shortly after we left the mud flats of Empalme Paradon. In the early morning the desert unreeled underfoot, but the sun was imprisoned by fat, black clouds. Then the saw-toothed hills unfolded in our path, and again we started upward.

High in the mountains we met a band of wanderers: Silent Indian men, barefoot and wearing hempen bands around their heads, coarse sarapes over their shoulders and white cotton breeches hanging almost to their ankles; round-faced women sheathed in greasy black from throat to toe, their heads discreetly covered by rebozos; a girl, half-grown, dancing along on bare, brown feet, long hair streaming, challenge in her smile,—an inexplicable rogue among a people whose maidens traditionally are sad and shy.

The women sat, as lifeless in appearance as sacks of potatoes or corn, far back on the hips of the tiny, gray mules. Their household goods and their children were gathered about them in such manner that they resembled big, black hens, huddled down in nests fastened to the almost inadequate backs of the burros. Other children were running to overtake the caravan, their hands filled with tortillas begged at mountain jacals.

We stopped at noon before a deserted hacienda, on land as smooth as a ballroom floor, lying within a circular wall of mountains peaks. The dome of the church had fallen and the doors were barred. The many houses of the workers now were formless heaps of gray earth. The *casa grande*, showing signs of having been a pale blue gem of Mexican colonial architecture, had been beaten drab and uninspiring by the tromp of passing seasons.

Before the door of the "big house", like the skeleton of a faithful wolf hound at the tomb of its master, stood a weather beaten, topless, tireless automobile in which the elements had left but slight vestige of a former sleek, mechanical beauty. How the machine was brought into that hollow in the unconquered hills, we never understood. Apparently it never would leave again.

We ate sardines and *galletas* at a tienda that once catered to the peons of the ranch, now a clearing house for scraggly bunches of ixle, traded by the Indians for bits of *pinoche*—crude sugar, lard, paraffin candles and bottles of warm beer.

The ranch once employed a thousand men, the store-

keeper said, and, with a furtive glance about him, "it is the agrarian revolution, señores."

We rode across the barren places that had been fields of green corn, across the hard-baked hollows that once held reservoirs of water. Following a long, stone and concrete aqueduct which, years ago, had been used to bring that water in seasonal plenty to the hacienda, we toiled upward again, through silent hills where cattle might have roamed, fine Spanish cattle to be sent as food to the peoples of the crowded cities.

Thus we came at last to the village of Zertouche, and squatted on the greasy floor of a mud hut, to prepare our evening meal. Later we lay down on that same floor and went to sleep.

Zertouche was at the end of a weary climb toward the sun. At our constant advance, however, the furnace in the sky had fled beyond the crags, and in its train descended the chill that sends the natives of the high places shivering under coarse blankets, in deathly fear of pneumonia.

In this miserable mountain village we found our first demonstration of hostility toward strangers. Our initial stop was at the lone tienda where a mestizo was busy sorting out bundles of *ixle*. He glanced around as we entered. He wore a peaked sombrero with a straight brim; his body was as broad as tall; his legs, clothed in leather, were abnormally small and bowed. He appeared, in the half dusk of the store, a square, topped by a triangle and supported by parenthesis.

"*Buenas tardes, señor.* We desire to obtain shelter for the night. If you will be so kind . . ."

"There is nothing here," he growled. "This is a tienda." He returned to his work.

A small boy stood behind the single counter. We bought grain for the horses. He seemed none too anxious to sell. "Chico," Bob asked, "do you know of anyone in the village who might rent us a room for the night?"

"I know of none," said the boy, and he walked away.

A tall Indian sauntered by, wrapped in a sarape. Bob called to him. "Pardon me, señor, where is the house of the *jefe*—the head man of the village?"

The Indian pointed to a jacal in the center of the cluster of earthen mounds. We rode to it and Bob dismounted, the letter from the mayor of Monclova in his hand. He walked to the doorway and removed his hat. He spoke to someone inside. He extended the letter. No one came to receive it.

Out of the half dusk within the hut, a human figure moved toward him, and he backed away. It was as slender and beardless as a boy of twelve, but it was tall as a man. Its skin was pale, like the bleached walls of the casa, and the hair on its head was like needles of black wire. From its open mouth trickled saliva that hung in cohesive threads from its chin. It tottered along on uncertain feet, and its long, bony arms, folded like misshapen wings across the blue front of overalls, supported palsied hands that fluttered constantly against the chest of the boy-man that must have slipped from the Potter's fingers.

This human thing was secured to the door jamb by a length of rope fastened about its middle.

Bob crammed the letter into his pocket and strode back to his horse. There was anger in his eyes. "That idiot gave me the creeps," he said. "Let's get away from this place."

Sullen faced, Indian women were drawing water at the village well. "There is water for horses in the arroyo," one of them said, as we rode up. Prejudice and suspicion were in her voice.

While Negra and Pistole nuzzled in the muddy wash of the boulder-strewn stream bed, an old Indian, with a gray beard, scrambled by on a burro. He was carrying a bundle of freshly cut corn stalks. "*Buenas tardes, señores.*" His manner and the tone of his voice were humble and kind.

"*Buenas tardes.* Do you know where we may be able to obtain shelter for the night? We will pay gladly . . ."

"*Pues* certainly, *señores*. You are welcome to my house," he indicated a single jacal across the arroyo from the village. "It is very poor, but it is all I have to offer. If you will honor your humble servant . . ."

"*Un mil gracias, señor.* We are deeply indebted to you," Bob accepted his hospitality. Our teeth were near to clattering from the cold that came seeping off the mountains.

"You may tie your horses in the corral with the burro, and I will bring them a bundle of stalks. My wife will prepare you food, if you will eat of our poor victuals." The old man led the way up the stony slope to his hut.

We unsaddled the horses, unstrapped our packs and slipped away to the tienda to buy eggs, lard, coffee and

sugar, as supplement to the native fare of beans, chili and tortillas. We returned to the jacal and sat on the earthen floor, to cook and eat with the Indian, his squaw and four children.

The woman, her dried-apple face twisted in shadows from the light of the flames, squatted over a spot of fire in one corner, and cooked the meal, stopping periodically to roll a cigarette of black grains of tobacco in a corn husk wrapper.

The man went out and brought blocks of wood for us to use as chairs. He and his family sat on the earthen floor. There was no table. We held tin plates on our knees and set coffee cups between our feet.

Two small children, sexlessly draped in dingy rags from their necks down, peeped at us from the shadows, or from behind the broad back of their father.

A slender, brown girl, dressed in black, held a baby in her arms and stared at us from large, sad eyes. When she realized we were looking at her, she withdrew into the darkness. "That girl is a perfect double for Dolores del Río," said Bob in English. He turned to the old man, "How old is your daughter, señor?"

"She has only twelve years, sir."

We went out to sit in the moonlight. The air was cold and clean, and we breathed deeply, to chase away the stale fumes of the *cocina*.

"Bob, why do you suppose these folks live over here, away from the rest of the villagers? And why are they so kind to us, when the others plainly are hostile? Do you think they have been driven out of the pueblo?

Surely they would not allow us to stay here if they were banished because of some contagious disease."

My companion did not answer, and I talked on, half to myself. "They are miserably poor, and there's hardly room for them to squeeze into their filthy, little den. We really shouldn't impose on them, but we can't sleep out here. We'd probably freeze to death.

"It seems like that always is the way; people who haven't enough for themselves, gladly divide with someone else. We've got to give this old fellow a couple of pesos before we leave tomorrow.

"This country is sure an inexhaustible fountain for the milk of human kindness." I laughed at my own awkwardness.

The glowing tip of Bob's cigarette flipped end over end, and died in the dampness of the stream bed. "It is a crying shame," he muttered. "She is beautiful, too. If that kid had a chance . . ." He failed to itemize the possible accomplishments of the sad-eyed child who was a "perfect double for Dolores del Río."

"All her life she will live hunkered over a fire, smoking corn husk cigarettes, bearing babies to exist in ignorance and poverty. She is only twelve. If she might be educated . . . If she had some decent clothes, even some clean clothes . . . I guess it is better, though, that she does not know about those things." He was silent again.

"Hell," he said, "let's get some sleep."

We crawled into the tiny hut and lay down on the floor beside the old Indian and his brood.

*When We Arrived in Saltillo
We Were Suspected of Being Bandits.*

CHAPTER XV

WHEN we arrived in Saltillo we were suspected of being bandits. When we departed we were accompanied to the city limits by a gendarme. But the two episodes had no official connection.

We descended on the little mountain metropolis, capital of the state of Coahuila, on Saturday afternoon, following a restless night at Zertouche, and a long day in the saddle, devoted to the alternate laboring up and sliding down rain-washed peaks. It was the sixteenth day of our trek from the border.

The sierras come together north of Saltillo in such manner as to form a natural fortification against invasion from that quarter. The city may be approached, in any direction except from the south, only by a series of narrow passes, and difficult climbs and descensions. Only a Hannibal—or an American named Scott, I thought, might storm the city from the north.

From Zertouche, with its handful of earth-gray, human burrows clinging to the brink of a dry arroyo, the trail led over a route so steep we often must stop to rest, or dismount and lead the horses over particularly precipitous places. Mile after mile we toiled upward.

The air of the higher altitude was raw and thin, and newly washed by rain. Breathing hard, legs aching,

heads painfully light, we dragged ourselves and our horses over the last unending stretch to the top of the world. There, on the highest point, we stopped, and gazed down into the long, green valley that leads away to Saltillo.

The road plunged down again as abruptly as it had climbed upward. We slid, by degrees, to the valley floor, clinging at times to the face of a cliff, getting down, time and again, to walk over treacherous stretches of water-soaked shale.

Crossing the sierras was trying even to travel-hardened bodies. Crossing the valley beyond the sierras, was even more trying to comfort-hungry minds. The city we had seen from the top of the mountains, seemed to draw farther and farther away as we rode toward it. Kilometer after youthfully impatient kilometer it eluded us.

Then we were there. Horses' hoofs rang hard, unaccustomed to paved streets. Pistole shied at every blowing bit of paper in the gutter, and every speeding automobile—and all of them seemed to be speeding.

Persons along the sidewalks pointed at us. Children gathered and trailed along behind. I watched my own reflection in passing shop windows, and I knew why the people pointed.

I was slouched in the saddle. Mud covered my boots and spurs. The straw, Treviño-endowed sombrero finally had succumbed to the constantly recurring beat of rain and blasts of sun heat. It drooped with fatigue, and seemed resigned to allow the outer edge of its wide brim to rest on my shoulders. My denim breeches were

greasy and discolored, the legs moulded to the shape of my horse's sides. The parts of my face that were not carpeted with bristly, black beard, were burned a chocolate brown, and my eyes peered hungrily from sunken, blue-rimmed depths. My shirt, dirty and sweat marked, was torn in a dozen places and sunburned skin showed through.

I looked at Bob. He was a worthy companion for the "brush rat" reflected in the shop windows.

We stopped before the Hotel Sainz. Bob went in, while I held the horses and glared at the curious crowd which gathered about me.

Bob returned with a Jenny Wren of a man in a checked suit and shoes that buttoned up the sides. They were arguing. The stranger looked at the horses and me, and increased the vehemence of his gesticulations. "I am sorry, señor," he said, "but all my rooms are taken. I have nothing."

He appeared vastly relieved when he had delivered his ultimatum, and he turned away.

But Bob was not to be left standing thus, on a curb before the jeering eyes of our audience. He called the man back. "We are strangers," he began quietly. "We do not know the customs of your country. We are honest men, and we are tired. We have traveled many leagues. Our horses also are tired, and they are frightened by the noises of the city.

"Your hotel has been recommended to us as one of service and courtesy. Our appearances, we know, are not those of men who usually come seeking hospitality

at your house of culture and obvious good taste. But our appearances are deceiving.

"We are newspapermen from the United States. We are not bandits. The desert and the mountains, the hard life of the north, the rigors of the rain and the fever of the sun have changed us." Bob truly was in fine fettle, I thought, and I could see the hotel man was weakening.

Then Bob played his trump. He drew from his shirt the letter written by the *presidente municipal* of Monclova. "Here," he said, "is a letter from one of our friends in the north." He extended the missive with a gesture that said, "Sir, my speech making is over. Now do something."

The clerk read the letter and lapsed for a moment into deep thought, indicated by the tapping of a forefinger on the tip of his nose. "Perhaps, señores," he decided, "I can prepare you a room in the back. It is a very poor room, in which we store old furniture, and you will have to give me time to place it in order. But my house is full, and there are no others.

"I do this only because you are travelers, and strangers in my country. Your horses, however, I can not accommodate. Perhaps you can leave them at the corral of the mounted police. I know of no other place."

The police cared for the horses. We went about the city, and bought new shirts. We visited a barber shop for haircuts, shaves and mustache trims. We were bathed, powdered and perfumed as only the Mexicans know how to indulge in such luxuries, and little Indian

boys beat tattoos on our boots with black-polish brushes.

We returned to the Hotel Sainz, improved in appearance and greatly refreshed. We approached the desk, and our friend, the clerk. "Is our room ready?" Bob asked. The clerk looked up. His eyes were blank; no sign of recognition shone therein. We laughed. He stared a moment, and a chuckle started in his throat, mounted to a high squeak and abruptly disappeared, leaving a smile to prove it had existed.

"Gentlemens," he said, in queer halting English, "you are different persons. I thought, before, you were *bandidos*. Forgive me."

He took us on a tour of the fine rooms of his establishment, and pointed out several which were unoccupied and which we might have "very reasonably." He showed us the humble quarters he had prepared for us, near the rear of the building. He would have a mozo move our pack to a better room, he said, and he began an endless stream of apologies. We halted him and, to his complete chagrin, made ourselves comfortably at home amid the cast-off furniture.

There was pain in his eyes and the gestures of his hands, but he forgave us, declaring, "it is a good jokes on me, no?" He walked to the telephone, threw back his head and, in a deep voice, requested the local newspaper to send a reporter to interview his "distinguished guests, *dos periodistas de los Estados Unidos*."

During our stay in Saltillo, he attached himself to us. We taught him English. We basked in the light of his

hospitality, and tasted often of his wine. We forgot, and he never mentioned, except with most abject humility, the "coming of the two gringo bandits."

*The Rest at Saltillo Was the Purge
We Needed to Rid Us of Discouragement . . .*

CHAPTER XVI

THE rest at Saltillo was the purge we needed to rid us of discouragement and make the remainder of the trip as attractive to the fickle eyes of youth as the fore-part had been. Our rejuvenation began with the cleaning up processes Saturday afternoon. It lasted until we left the city Monday morning.

After our visit to the barber, we minded the advice of Señor Treviño and went to the state palace to meet the governor.

The walls about the main staircase at the palace were painted with scenes of the varied life and resources of Coahuila. These murals were done in actual colors and with a faithfulness in execution, that sacrificed only perspective. They depicted the strife, the suffering, the humility and, to a lesser degree, the simple pleasures of the Indian population.

The artist, however, had worked with confidence and power in his brush, and the result suggested the strength of character and a measure of the determination in his humble people.

In one striking piece, a young native in cotton clothes and gauraches stood before the broken walls of the village church. His head was bared, and his face turned toward heaven. Near him, a woman and child, dressed

in black, were bowed to the earth. About them and over the bleached sands of the desert, fell flakes of snow!

The unwatered regions were represented, with their many cacti, and bones glaring white in the sun. But green fields of maize and plantations of maguey encroached upon the vast barren places, aided by the spreading net of irrigation channels. Men and burros appeared in the maguey, to draw forth its juices and haul them away to be fermented into *pulque*. Others stripped the golden ears from the stalks of corn and filled the ancient, stone granaries.

Vaqueros flung their ropes over the spreading horns of half-wild bulls. Bare-legged farmers drove oxen to their plows. Weary, broken men burrowed into the bowels of the earth and brought out a wealth of minerals. Smokestacks towered godlike above a community of thatched jacals.

Fierce horsemen charged across the painted landscape, guns to their shoulders and cartridge belts crossed on their chests. Invading armies pursued with fire and steel.

Plains, deserts, mountains and forests had formed beneath the artist's brush, with an extravagance possible only in a country where infinite distances and magnificent sweeps of unconquered sierras strike awe even into the souls of those who are born, live and die surrounded by them.

Following this path of pictures, an hour passed while we climbed to the second floor of the capitol. Every step brought a new thrill, or a new tightening about the heart.

We entered an antechamber, where others had arrived before us. We gave our card to a wizened mestizo wearing a high, stiff collar, sitting at a roll-top desk. He waved us to a chair. Another hour passed, while we waited, uncomfortably shifting about, missing the smoother seat of the saddle.

A young man with an intelligent forehead and thick, black hair, walked rapidly into the room. He stopped at the desk of the old mestizo, and there was anger in his voice. "Why did you not send this in before?" He held a business card in his hand. "Why have you made these gentlemen wait? Where are they?"

I gulped; the doorman was pointing at us.

The young man, smiling, bowed from the waist. "I am sorry, señores. I did not know you were here. I have been expecting you. Señor Treviño telephoned from Monclova."

He conducted us into an inner-office. "The governor has not come in, yet." We walked through a luxurious suite of rooms, finished in maroon leather and deep red paneling. We spoke of Señor Treviño and his family, of the state of Coahuila and of the hospitality of the Mexican people. We admired the ancient, boldly carved woodwork of the furnishings in the executive chambers.

The young man regretted that the governor had not arrived. If we did not care to wait longer, he said, he would assure us His Excellency would write a letter asking for us the consideration of those with whom we came in contact. He, himself, would bring the letter to our hotel. We thanked him and departed.

While I was writing a letter, Bob carried some film to a photographer's shop. He brought Jerry Clemens back with him. Jerry was selling fountain pens to Mexican wholesale dealers, and the only Spanish phrase he knew was "*pluma fuente de Waterman*,"—Waterman fountain pen. He had come to Saltillo by plane, making stops at Juárez, Chihuahua and Torreón. He was lonesome, with the loneliness of a foreigner in a land where even the company of conversation is denied him. Bob found him at the photographer's, attempting to buy a camera. I can imagine the startled look on his face when my Oriental companion turned to him and said, "What's the matter, old man? Don't you speak the language?"

Jerry loafed about with us Saturday night. He made us feel very superior, by asking for translations of the names over the shops and the words overheard in the street. He treated us to a moving picture.

Sunday morning he came in while we were having a late breakfast under the banana tree in the patio. "Have you visited that old fort on top of the hill?" he asked.

"No. We saw it from the road as we came into town. What was it built for, to resist the gringo invasion in 1847?"

"I imagine so. The clerk over at the Coahuila said it had been used several times. He is under the impression it first was occupied by the troops of Emperor Maximilian. What do you say we walk up there and look it over?"

We climbed the hill that divides Saltillo into two parts. Of the adobe structure that once crowned it,

only a few massive, crumbling walls, punctured by rifle vents, remained. In the center of the enclosure there was a rectangular pit, approximately six feet wide, twenty feet long and five feet in depth. The walls, themselves, must have been twelve feet high when they were built. The entire structure, including two small offsets, could not have housed more than two hundred fighting men and their provisions.

Its lofty position, commanding a view of the entire city, and approachable from only one angle, however, would make it a difficult position to carry, even though it were defended by few troops.

After a tour of the ruined structure, we started back down the hill. A row of houses that once might have been barracks, stood near the city water works. An old man was sitting under a tree before one of the open doors. We sat down to rest in the shade beside him.

"You have lived here a long time?" Bob asked.

"Sí, señor."

"The fort, it has been here a long time, also, is it not true?"

"Many, many years, señor. I can not remember so long."

"Has there been fighting on the hilltop?"

"Sí, señor, many times. Often the horsemen come and charge along this same street. But the guns drive them back until they run away. They never have reached the fort."

"Who was fighting, *viejo*?"

"The troops, señor. Always they are the same. Young men with rifles and pistols and swords, and many fleet

horses. Sometimes they call themselves Villistas, sometimes Carranzistas, or Liberales, or Revolucionarios. But always it is the same. They fire their guns and shout, 'Viva Mejico,' and the ones in the fort fire back. There is much shooting; men fall from their horses and are left on the hillside. The others ride away."

"Have there been gringo soldiers in the attack, *viejo*?"

"I have heard stories of their coming, señor, but I have never seen them. Perhaps they have, *quién sabe?*"

We walked back to the city, and stopped at a *cantina* for gin and bitters.

Jerry had lunch with us at the Sainz, and we went out to dinner with him at the Hotel Coahuila. In the desert we had eaten the simplest of foods. We were hungry for sweets and fruits and rich pastries. We ate too much, and drank too much wine. Next day Bob was ill.

Cold, gray clouds filled the sky, and pestered the earth with slender needles of rain. We packed to leave. The horses had been brought in from the pastures. The letter from the governor had been delivered. We stopped at the Hotel Coahuila, to say farewell to our companion of the past two days. "Goodby," said Jerry Clemens of Boulder, Colorado. "I hope we'll meet again at San Luis or Mexico City. I'll be on the lookout for you." Loneliness returned to his face. We did not see him again.

"So long." We walked rapidly away, toward the police station.

Manuel was the gendarme who "escorted" us to the city limits. He had been our faithful shadow for two days and nights.

The afternoon we arrived in Saltillo, he was our first acquaintance among the city officials. We rode into the patio at the *palacio municipal*, and asked for the chief of police. He was out of the city. "But Señor Manuel is here," said one of the officers, staring at our horses. He directed us to a great, brown grin, dressed in a green uniform with black trimmings, leather puttees, bright yellow shoes and long, disjointed spurs.

Señor Manuel (we never knew his family name) was one of the mounted patrolmen. He led our horses into one of a row of stone stalls inside the patio, and took us to see one of the assistant chiefs.

That gentleman directed him to send our mounts to the municipal corral and see that they were given corn and turned into the pasture. He conducted us into a storage room, to which he alone held a key, and said we might leave our saddles and trappings there until we were ready for them again.

If we desired it, he said, we might have Manuel as a bodyguard, during our stay in the city. We declined, thanked him for his many kindnesses, and assured him we would be completely safe. From that hour forward, however, we found ourselves constantly under the watchful eye of our faithful shadow, Señor Manuel, the Great Brown Grin in the Bright Green Uniform.

Saturday evening when we went to the theater, Manual was standing in the cantina next door. When we came out of the theater, he was standing on the curb,

talking to a group of men. When we walked in the park that night, we heard the clatter of Manuel's horse's hoofs, and, as we entered the hotel, their echo receded along the pavement.

Manuel also became our counselor. It was he who advised me to buy a *capa*—a large square of rubberized cloth with a hole for a person's head in the center—to protect me from the heavy rains we were sure to encounter as we traveled to the south.

He went with me to buy batteries for an electric torch, recovered from the box we had expressed at Aura, and his uniform frightened the dealer into selling them to us at a reasonable price.

It was Manuel, too, who applied native remedies to the boil on Negra's back, and put the calm, old animal in condition to continue the trip.

When we were ready to leave the city, he brought the horses, rested and well-fed, to the municipal palace. Boys saddled them and made the packs secure. Manuel pointed to the camera and asked if we would make a picture with him. One of his fellow policemen snapped the shutter, as the three of us stood before our horses, in the patio; great happiness shone in Manuel's eyes, and great respect in the faces of his associates.

Up and up, over the rough cobblestones that climb out of Saltillo toward the south, we rode in silence. There was a sharp drizzle of rain and I wore the new rain coat. Manuel had a coarse sarape coiled about his throat. Bob wore the light trench coat of a Japanese army officer.

Manuel's military cap was set at an inspiring angle,

and he rode erect and proudly. Bob and I slouched forward and drew our shoulders under the protective brims of our sombreros. The three of us climbed and climbed, along a street that seemed to run almost straight up to the sky.

Finally we came to the top, and to the city limits. A trail led away across a high, flat plain of alternate patches of green and barren gray. Across those same plains, just eighty-four years before our coming, General Zachary Taylor led an army from the United States into the, for some vague reason, decisive battle of Buena Vista.

We paused to say farewell. Behind us, the little white city was huddled down in its twin mountain valleys, and the rain was bathing it in gentle streams.

"Tonight or tomorrow you will stop at my mother's ranch?" asked Manuel. We told him we would. "It is high in the sierras, and it is better you sleep in a house. The nights are very cold."

"Thank you, Manuel. *Adiós.*"

"*Adiós, señores. Hasta la vista.*"

- "*Hasta la vista,* Manuel." We turned our backs on the city that sent us forth to its boundaries, under police escort. And the escort, spurs jangling and head held high, galloped back down the hill.

*I Dreamed I Was Trapped
In a Gargantuan Ice-Box . . .*

CHAPTER XVII

I DREAMED I was trapped in a Gargantuan ice-box filled with green wine bottles. Streams of purple liquor were pouring from every bottle, and the level of the liquor was even with my lips. I must continue to drink—or drown. Already there was a painful tightness under my belt, and my head felt as if it were filling, like a toy balloon, with some sulphurous gas, and eventually must burst.

Out of the depths of the Bacchanalian pool, a serpent arose. His cruel, gleaming eyes stared into mine. Slowly he began to coil himself about my neck. Every coil slithered cold and clammy against my cheeks. I awoke. My body was damp and chilled. I was rigid with fear. I was lying on a cement floor, my head on the skirt of a saddle. And something, some silent, living thing was moving in the darkness, every movement drawing it coldly against my face.

The serpent of the dream remained fresh in my memory, and I was afraid to move.

If there was a snake sharing my bed, I knew I must lie still. Any movement might cause it to strike. Stories I had read of reptiles attracted to sleeping children by the warmth of their bodies, reread themselves to me there in the dark. My mind was dragging itself from

the mire of sleep. My limbs were bound, helpless, by the knowledge of the possible fatality of movement.

"Where am I?" The question beat at my temples, seeking admission. My stomach throbbed dully. That would be from all the fancy foods and drinks at Saltillo. But we had gone from Saltillo; Manuel rode with us to the city limits. It had been raining. We passed the Coahuila state school of agriculture, a two-story brick building with a handful of mud cells nestled about it. Across the road, two boys had been plowing a team of oxen. They had stumbled along after the sturdy animals, over deep furrows of earth as red as newly spilled blood. They were barefoot, and the rain poured in shining streams from the brims of their sombreros.

Such trivial things marshalled themselves, in their rightful sequence, through my mind, while I lay there in the darkness, cold perspiration gathering on my skin.

I tried to push them aside, to give admittance to the question, "where am I?" But they refused to be cast out, and they flickered by, a series of sharp, distinct pictures, as if they were being projected from the slow motion attachment of a cinema machine.

We passed the village of Buena Vista, and the barren battlefield of Taylor's triumph. A group of natives, wrapped in their blankets, squatted under a low ramada. Pistole became frightened and ran for half a mile before I could pull him down and wait for Bob. Bob was ill. I had not slept well the night before, and my disposition was becoming frayed at the edges.

We rode through fallen villages and deserted ranches, their gray stones dripping in the rain. To the east and

to the west, other ranches nestled to the mountainside, and the occasional dome of a church thrust up through trees of a variety unknown to me.

The day's happenings continued to drag through my recollection.

It had been almost noon when we left Saltillo. The clouds gave an impression of dusk when we arrived at the Rancho Agua Nueva.

"That's where I am now, in the office of the hacienda at Agua Nueva." I felt the faintest tremor of relief at having established myself geographically.

But still I was lying helplessly on my back, in the darkness, and every nerve in my system was screaming to withdraw from that serpentine something brushing against my cheek.

It had been chill and damp when we arrived at Agua Nueva. The ranch hands were sitting about the tienda, wrapped in coarse, faded sarapes that hung below their knees. A bright-eyed muchacho ran out to meet us, and asked if he might walk our horses awhile, so they would not take cold.

The owner of the ranch lived in Saltillo. The major-domo read the letter from the governor. There was no place to sleep, he said. The hacienda had been stripped of its furnishings. But we might stable our horses in the patio, amid the ruins of fallen stone arches, and we might make our beds on the floor of the office. It, at least, was shelter from the cold, mountain rain.

On the shelves of the tienda, covered with dust, were several boxes of oatmeal. "Let's buy some of that for

supper," said Bob. "I have an illness of the stomach. I am afraid I will not be able to eat anything heavy."

We bought the oatmeal. A tall, white-haired, old man was standing in the store. His clothing showed many patches, but it was cleaner, and his skin was whiter than that of the mestizos and Indians standing about him. "Señores," he said, "if you wish, my wife will prepare the evening meal for you."

We went with him to his casita. The oatmeal was cooked into a thick gruel, with milk, and flavored strongly with bits of cinnamon bark. It was served steaming hot, from a white enameled coffee pot.

We sat down to a table that almost filled the little room. Through the open door, we could see a white-washed, stone brazier, over which our food was being prepared by the señora and her daughter. The girl was dressed in clean, freshly starched blouse and blue skirt, and there was a welcome freshness about the full, gray house-dress of the older woman.

The old man entered with an earthen jar of cool water. His hair had been brushed until it shone like silver in the candlelight. He stood respectfully in one corner, until we prevailed upon him to sit at the table with us and share our food.

Bob and the aged gentleman ate of the gruel. I had eggs, tomatoes, chili, frijoles and tortillas, and hot coffee brought by the nimble-fingered señorita. Bob drank boiled goat milk, and I laughed at his infirmities. But the last laugh was not mine.

After the women had cleared away the dishes, we

sat and talked. Our host, it plainly was evident, was miserably poor and too old to work.

Yet he and his family, the señora and the single daughter, possessed a quiet charm of courtesy and intelligence, distinctive even in this land where hospitality and native understanding have allied with faith, in a struggle against avarice and violence. As we started away, we offered them two pesos. They refused, proudly, but we left the coins on the table and walked out, thanking them for their kindness.

The trembling voice of the old man followed us out into the night. "The great God will bless you, caballeros."

We went to bed on the concrete floor of the ranch office. Our saddles were our pillows. We lay on a blanket, raincoats over us.

When I awakened there in the dark, however, there was nothing over me, and nothing under me but the cold floor and one corner of the saddle skirt. And I felt that living, creeping movement against my cheek.

I lay like a man bound in a tomb, fear in my veins, clammy sweat collecting on my body. I did not dare move. I was too rigid even to tremble.

Something slithered across my chest, and away over the concrete. There was a tug at my trouser's leg. The motion against my face ceased a moment. I could stand it no longer. I jerked myself to a sitting position. There was a mad scramble of clawed feet.

I felt under the saddle for the electric torch which had been repaired in Saltillo. Its rays revealed a large, gray rat peering from a hole in the wall. His eyes glit-

tered in the light. I hurled a boot. He ducked from sight.

I turned the light on Bob. He groaned softly in his sleep, and his hands were held against his abdomen.

I went out into the cold, wind-swept patio. Pistole whinnied softly. I thrust my finger deep into my throat.

Bob still slept when I returned. I pulled his slicker over him, retrieved my boot from the rat's corner and returned to my bed, and restful slumber.

*From Saltillo to San Luis Potosí,
The Old Camino Real . . Leads Directly South.*

CHAPTER XVIII

FROM Saltillo to San Luis Potosí, our next principal objective, the old *camino real*—royal road—of colonial days, leads directly south. It does not take so direct a route as the railroad, but both are contained in the same series of cigar-shaped, mountain valleys, both climb together through the same passes and skirt the same peaks.

The road is, by far, the more leisurely of the two, and certainly it is more considerate of the ranches and farms which justify its existence. Whereas the *camino real* meanders from mountainside village to mountainside village or from rancho to rancho, the railroad follows the compass or the path of least resistance. Whereas the *camino real* clammers up to the *haciendado's* front door, to his pulque factory, to his bins of grain, and away again to give like service to his neighbor, the railroad holds aloof,—makes Gaul come to Caesar.

Often, however, the builders of the iron road have had the courtesy to name the toy depots for the *haciendas* they serve. For example, the Rancho Agua Nueva, where we spent the first night after leaving Saltillo, is three kilometers from the railroad. Hard by the right-of-way, however, there is a station from which the cattle and corn of the ranch are shipped to market.

Above the red, match-box depot is the sign, "Estación (station) Agua Nueva."

In like manner, the ranches of Gómez Farias and La Ventura are served by *estaciones* bearing their names.

More often than not, the road, in its efforts to please, must cross back and forth over the twin rails of its more modern rival. Where that happens, the station is located close to the crossing.

So it came to pass, although we followed the camino real, the third and fourth nights of the journey to San Luis Potosí found us at railway stations. The first and second nights were spent at ranches. You already have read of the first, an episode of rodents and the penalties paid by him who eats overly well.

2.

Bob still was ill when we stopped at the Rancho Gómez Farias, and we remained there for half a day and the following night.

We had lunch on the counter of the tienda. It consisted of sardines served in the can, galletas, raisins, white cheese, soda water and bananas. At least, that is what I ate. Bob stuck to his glass of goat milk, and a few nibbles at the cheese.

While we were eating, a rural policeman, in leather puttees, khaki shirt and blue cotton breeches, edged into the store and scrutinized us suspiciously. He wore a bone-handled revolver in a richly carved holster, tied low on his thigh.

A coil of black, horse-hair rope spun through the door of the tienda, and a *charro* (rancher) followed it.

He wore a felt sombrero, tight leather breeches, high-heeled shoes and jangling, silver-mounted spurs. His shirt was of yellow silk, its tails tied in a knot at his belt buckle. Outside, in the street, a fiery, young *palomino*—a buckskin with flaxen mane and tail—fretted about at the end of the lariat which had been thrown into the tienda.

The charro bought coffee and sugar, and placed them inside his shirt. Bob and I wandered out, cheese in hand, to admire his horse. The policeman followed us, furtive even in his walk. The charro coiled his rope and tied it to the saddle. The reins were in his hand. The palomino reared, its forefeet fanning. The charro leapt, easy, catlike to the horse's back. With a flourish of his sombrero and a flash of white teeth, he was gone.

I stood there, staring after him, mentally bowing before the shrine of exquisite horsemanship. "Never again will I scoff at the prowess of Mexican riders in movie 'westerns,'" I murmured. Bob was watching my face, grinning.

The rural policeman was hovering near. After a few simple maneuvers, Bob collared him. "Señor, you seem to be in charge here." The timid, little man assumed an air of importance.

"I am of the policía, señor. My name is . . ."

"But certainly, señor." On occasions where diplomacy was needed, as, in truth, on most others, Bob was official spokesman. "Our friends, the mounted police in Saltillo, told us about you. You must be a very brave man. They say you have killed . . ."

He patted his revolver significantly. "I am of the *policía*."

"We are periodistas, señor. We seek a place of shelter for the night. We have here a letter from the governor." The policeman laborously read the paper Bob extended to him.

"Come with me, señores. I will find you lodging and a place for your horses."

A single, often repaired billiard table stands on the earthen floor of a house in a side street of Gómez Farias. The table never could have been brought in through the single door. The house, we decided, must have been built around it.

In one corner of the room was a phonograph, of the box variety; its horn, shaped like a morning glory, was attached to the needle arm. In another corner stood a short counter over which bottled beer was sold,—bottled beer and peanuts, potatoes, candles, tobacco and animal crackers.

The proprietor of the rancho's palace of pleasure furnished a corral for our horses, and we spent the afternoon in pleasant conversation with him and the policeman. The billiard table we used as a couch, that we might recline in comfort while we talked.

The policeman left us; he must hurry away on business, he said. He had been watching a man trotting toward the billiard parlor from the east, but his own route lay in the opposite direction. The running man, a typical short-limbed, well-muscled Indian with black eyes and a beardless face, stopped in the door before us.

He was wearing "pyjamas" and gauraches. A leather pouch was swung from his shoulder.

He spoke to the owner of the billiard hall, in a tongue I supposed was an Indian dialect. They peered out in the direction the policeman had taken. The Indian pointed at us. Evidently our host reassured him, for he drew a bottle of clear liquor from the leather pouch. The bottle was placed under the counter. The Indian was given a coin, and he trotted away.

I was speechless.

"I think," said Bob, "you have witnessed a bit of Mexican bootlegging."

I turned to the host, in my blunt, yankee manner, and asked: "But why, señor, are you so secretive in purchasing mescal? Surely alcoholic drinks are not prohibited in Mexico?"

"No, señor, they are not prohibited, but the tax is high. I buy little and I sell little. It is more profitable to buy the *vino* from the Indians who make it."

"You are very kind, señor, for explaining. Of course I should have known." But I, of course, was too young to remember the activities of the original "leggers" and their enemy, the "revenooer", in my own United States.

A burro pattered to a stop before the door. Across its back, ends almost touching the earth, was a roll of soiled canvas. The canvas was wrapped about some slender form which appeared to be that of a human being. And drops of blood fell from its open ends!

Atop this gruesome burden perched a fat-bodied, scrawny-legged Indian from the sierras. His straw sombrero drooped low over his greasy, sullen face. Breeches

were rolled high on his chocolate thighs. His chest bulged under a flimsy, white shirt. He slid to the ground, threw the canvas-wrapped bundle easily across his shoulder and trotted heavily into the billiard parlor. Blood trickled off his burden, down the backs of his bare, brown legs.

"And this, I suppose, is the Mexican manner of being 'taken for a ride,'" I muttered to Bob, as we followed into the semi-darkness of the room.

The Indian threw his bundle to the floor, in a dusty corner. The billiard parlor operator handed him a small bag of coins. He unrolled the red-stained canvas. A long, round-bodied deer lay at our feet, a broken arrow through its broad chest.

We ate that night at the home of a goat herdsman. I dined on bits of mutton cooked in a thin stew of tomatoes and chili. Bob had boiled goat milk and crackers. We slept on straw mats in the "parlor" at the home of the majordomo.

3.

All day we rode, at an easy pace, to the Estación La Ventura. The hotel clerk at Saltillo had given us the name of a señora there, from whom we might obtain a room and an evening meal. The nights were too cold in that altitude to sleep on the ground. All the natives, we were told, live in constant dread of pneumonia.

The village consisted of a hollow square of solid house fronts all turned to the center of the plaza, each abode being designated by a door and a grill-covered window. At each of the four corners of the plaza, a

road leads to the outside world, but they show scant signs of travel.

Next to the roadway leading from the railroad and the red depot is a school,—a new school of the new order, where the children of the agrarians are educated. Before it stands a pair of basketball standards. When we rode into the inner sanctum of the square, a mob of ragged boys were struggling over a ball made of rolled-up sack cloth, with which they bombarded the back-boards of the goals. Upon our arrival the game was abandoned and the players gathered about our horses. We found the home of the woman we sought, and a few of the more brazen of the children followed us in. Bob became angry and shooed them away.

The señora, a widow, accepted our note from the hotel clerk, and welcomed us to her humble home. "In the winter," she said, "the school teacher lives here. But now it is vacation time and you may have her room for the night. You must wait for your supper. There are two young engineers who take their meals here. They will not be back until dark. If you will be so kind . . ."

"But certainly, señora. We have not the least hunger."

There was a commotion before the door. Children screamed and laughed. Pistole snorted. A man shouted from across the plaza. Bob and I ran into the street in time to see an urchin poke Negra with a sharp stick, and dash away as the horse lashed out with both rear hoofs. Again there were screams and laughter, and the urchin closed in for another thrust.

Bob intercepted him, chased him away, chased them all away and said he would thrash them if they came

back. I laughed. "It's association, general. I will make a good Irishman out of a 'yellow peril' before this trip is over." We led the horses around to the corral.

We sat conversing with the señora and one of her neighbors. There was a sharp explosion. Bob and I leaped to our feet. The women laughed, and continued their sewing. Again there was an explosion. It sounded as if it were in the house next door. I peered out the window. There were few people in the plaza, and none of them seemed to have noticed the two shots.

"What was it, señora?" Bob asked softly and with apology in his voice.

"It is the funeral of an infant," she said. "They are shooting the fireworks."

Polite questioning appeared in Bob's eyes.

"When an infant dies in Mexico," the woman explained, "we rejoice that he is returning to the angels. Fireworks form a part of the funeral ceremony."

There was another explosion. I walked to the door and looked out across the plaza. From a portal, but two distant from ours, walked eight persons. One of them, a tall man, bore a tiny coffin on his shoulder.

The eight marched abreast, across the square. On an end was a man with a basket, who tossed firecrackers into the air. Beside him were two musicians with guitar and violin, playing a merry tune. In the center walked the man with the coffin on his shoulder, and a slender woman. Next to the woman were a man with a pick and a man with a shovel. On the remaining end of the funeral line, marched a young girl with a basket of flowers. They moved rapidly across the plaza, their

heads thrown back, singing. Presently they were out of the square of houses, and out of my vision, but the music and the intermittent explosions continued, fading slowly. I turned about. Our hostess and her neighbor were gossiping pleasantly, their sewing uninterrupted.

When the two engineers came, we ate. Over the coffee we talked. They were youths but little older than we. One of them had studied a year at the University of Illinois. Both had been to school in the City of Mexico. They spoke to us freely and hospitably, but there seemed to be the faintest hint of resentment in the voice of the young man who had lived in the United States.

The Rancho La Ventura had been taken by the government, to be divided among the agristas, they said. They had been sent to survey the plots.

"Free land for all men," they declared, "is the decree of the revolutionary party. Many Mexicans are returning from the United States to claim their shares of the great ranches now being confiscated."

Again there sprang into my mind that old, history-book phrase of my early school days, "forty acres and a mule." For a moment, I was bitter at the movement that was destroying the beauty and culture of the colonial haciendas in Mexico, to give lazy, ignorant Indians sections of land, I believed they never would till. But it is right, I reasoned. We must aid the unfortunate many, at the expense of the privileged few. I am a child of democracy. It has been taught me as the right.

4.

We left La Ventura at dawn, breakfastless and un-washed. The sun scarcely had chased away the morning's chill, when we arrived at a water hole surrounded by a carpet of green grass, and shaded by a giant cypress tree.

The horses were turned loose to graze, and we lay flat on the turf, to dip our faces into the clear pool before preparing food.

Near the southern shore of the reservoir there was a cement marker, twice as tall as a man, indicating the boundary between the states of Coahuila and Zacatecas. Once it had been a towering, white obelisk, but wind and rain had discolored it and its square corners had been worn round by the many generations of cattle and horses, that have found it a convenient place to scratch their sides.

We rode into Zacatecas, and found only a continuation of the desert. On the bald, blistered surface of the earth, a minute circle of green appeared many miles to the south. It furnished us an objective, and shortly after noon it evolved into another water hole, surrounded by trees.

The horses were staked in a thicket of wild plum bushes, and we sat down under a towering cottonwood at the water's edge, to eat our lunch.

The food and the cool shade made me drowsy and I went to sleep. I awakened to find an old man looking down at me, from the back of a horse. "Buenas tardes, señor."

I answered his greeting, and Bob also arose from his earthen couch.

The old gentleman had a long white beard, and he was dressed in the usual style of the charro. His tight, leather trousers were profusely embossed; his shirt, freshly starched, was knotted across an expansive paunch; a short jacket, felt sombrero, zapatos and spurs completed his attire.

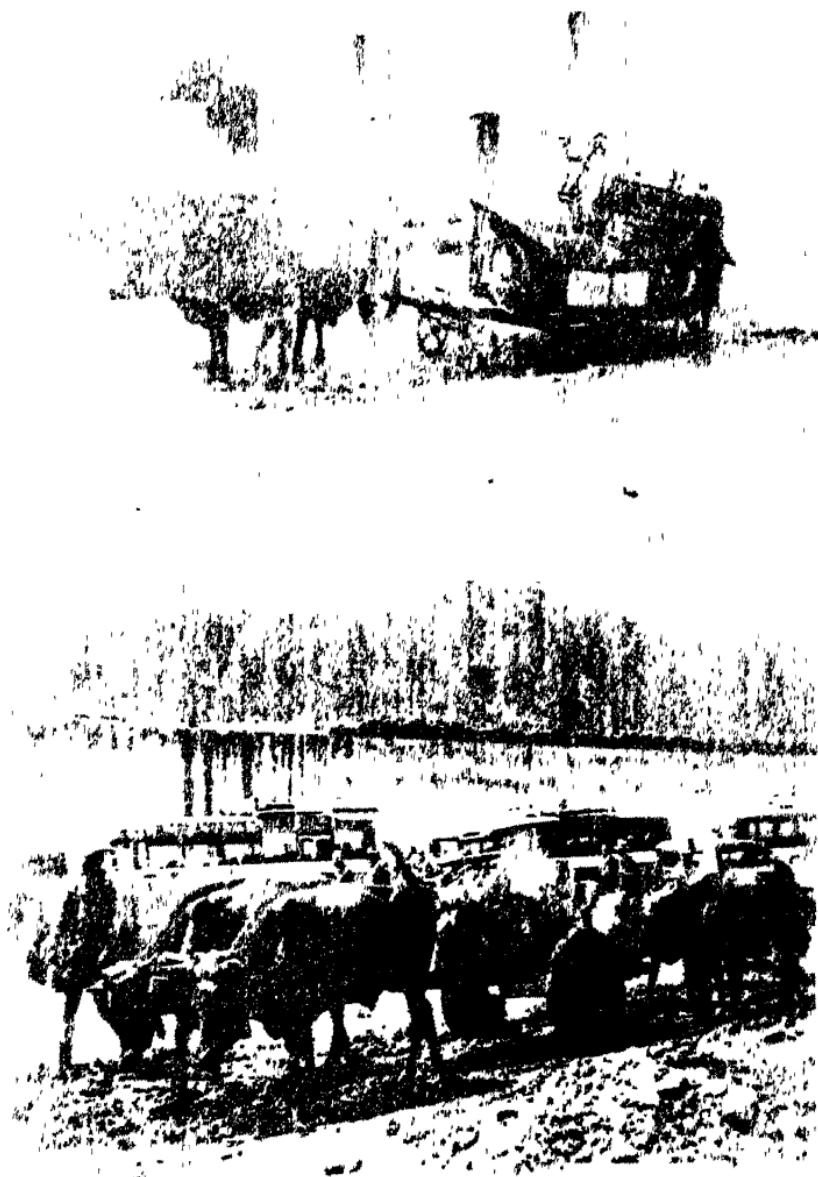
His horse was young and spirited. A fine play of slender muscles beneath sleek, black hide, drew the eye away from the wealth of silver worked into his saddle and bridle.

The man lowered himself heavily to the ground. His face revealed his curiosity, but he did not ask our business. He did ask if we had eaten. We assured him we had, and offered him a cigarette. He sat down to smoke. He told us he was the owner of the ranch upon which we were camped, and that his house was not far distant. If we would ride with him, he said, he would extend to us the humble hospitality afforded there.

We rode into a square of mud huts colored like the desert and completely invisible from a distance of half a mile. At the door of one of these, we dismounted and tied the horses. We entered where four women were busy making cheese. The room was dark with clouds of flies and gnats, and on tables, chairs and shelves were many earthen jars and square oil tins full of milk.

The old man ordered a corner of the center table cleared, and we sat down. One of the women brought a dish of fresh, white cheese, sliced thin. She asked if we would like wine, and Bob explained that his illness prevented his drinking anything but boiled milk.

We sat for an hour at the casita, eating and drinking,



AT GOMEZ FARIA'S
Land of Old and New

talking and smoking. The old charro walked with us to the edge of the square, and waved farewell.

Late in the afternoon, we completed the journey across a corner of Zacatecas and entered the state of San Luis Potosí. We stopped for the night at El Salado, a station in a desert valley. A young man was in charge. An Indian and his wife lived in a jacal back of the depot and did the cooking for the agent. We were invited to supper and allowed to sleep on the concrete floor of the kitchen.

The young man had not been long in the desert. He was lonesome. We conversed until late in the evening, sitting around a small table on which sputtered a tall, paraffin candle.

Our friend, an employe of the Mexican National Railway, was a staunch supporter of the revolutionary government. He told us two stories, however, that revealed the average Mexican's opinion of the high-handed rule of General Calles, and the national scorn for the, at that time, president, Ortiz Rubio. These stories, which we heard often again, are typical of the political jibes which form a considerable portion of Mexican humor.

It seems there was a great livestock exhibit in the capital city. To this exhibit were brought thoroughbred animals from all parts of the republic. In almost every instance, however, the entries from Santa Barbara, General Calles' ranch, were awarded the blue ribbons.

After the judging, a foreigner who was a close friend of the "dictator", said to him: "General Calles, you have some splendid stock here, and I congratulate you

on the many triumphs of Santa Barbara. I must confess, however, that I am disappointed."

"Disappointed?"

"Yes, my friend. You have many fine animals, but the burro is not among them. In my opinion, the burro is the animal most widely seen, the most widely used and the most typical of Mexico. There is no burro in your exhibit."

"No, señor," the story tellers quote Calles as saying, "there are no burros here. I have but one thoroughbred jackass, and him I keep in the president's palace on Grasshopper Hill."

The second story is more typically native, more bluntly Mexican.

Three men were discussing the wonders of surgery and the miraculous manner in which some individuals attained to high places despite physical handicaps. One of the men was a citizen of France, one of the United States, the third of Mexico.

"We have a classic example in my country," said the Frenchman. "During the war, a French athlete lost a leg, but he came back to retain his standing as a champion cross-country runner."

"In the United States," said the American, "we have a man with only one arm, who, by constant training, has become the most rapid typist in the nation."

"Señores, in this one thing you must grant supremacy to Mexico," said the third man. "In my country we have a man without a head,—and he has been made president."

*A Metal Marker, Stands . . .
Just North of the Town of Vanegas.*

CHAPTER XIX

A METAL marker, white with black numerals, stands on the National Railroad right-of-way, just north of the town of Vanegas. The figures 722, inscribed thereon, indicate Mexico City to be just that many kilometers to the south.

Vanegas, itself, is halfway between the 722 and the 721 posts. A sign over the station reveals that the altitude there is five thousand feet above sea level. At the capital the altitude is more than seven thousand. At Villa Acuña it is less than five hundred.

The sign does not reveal, however, that Vanegas is approximately half way between Villa Acuña and Mexico City. The Railroad does not know that. The railroad goes to Nuevo Laredo and Piedras Negras.

Bob and I had it all figured out days ahead. The entire trip, we calculated, would approximate 1,445 kilometers. The 722 marker, then, we designated as the half-way point. Vanegas, the nearest town, was to be the scene of festivities, we decided.

Some sort of celebration seemed in order, so, as we rode, we planned a two-man fiesta to commemorate the occasion. First there would be a dinner of many courses; then store-bought cigarettes; champagne, perhaps,—perhaps señoritas.

Who knows? Such things have been.

It was an idyllic picture we painted on a canvas of dreams, as we drifted through the silent waste places.

We reckoned, however, without allowing for the limited facilities of the town and the limited capacity of Bob's still unsettled stomach.

We rode to Vanegas from the Estación El Salado. For the greater part, our route lay across a wilderness of brush and cacti, desolated by the liquid blasts of the rainy season. Only an occasional field of maguey or a herd of goats attested to human habitation.

Twice during the day, we halted to chat with herds-men. They stopped us with requests for matches, but their eyes reflected loneliness and we got down to visit with them for the duration of a cigarette. From dawn until dark every day, they said, they sat alone in the brush, while their flocks ranged about gaining sustenance from the scanty grass, and the leaves and beans of the mesquite.

Since early morning, the rain, sun and wind had taken turns at plaguing us. The elements, it seemed, were combining to make the occasion of our arrival at the half-way mark one to be remembered because of a slow, torturous sequence of minor irritations.

The morning was sharp and cold and the air was heavy with fog. We wrapped ourselves in all the clothing we possessed.

Our bodies were covered with insect bites, received during the night from the hidden pediculous hoards that infested the pile of sacking on which we made our beds. While we saddled the horses, we observed another

group of wanderers, two Indian men and their women, which had spent the night in the tool house across from the depot. The men were lying on the hard cinders, their greasy, black heads in the women's laps, and feminine fingers were probing about to capture scurrying "beasties" and snap them between blood-stained thumb nails.

We still were in sight of El Salado when the sun leapt above the sierras like the surging stream of metal from a newly tapped furnace. We stripped off our coats, and perspiration poured over skin but recently blue with cold.

Then clouds scuttled across the heat waves. We unstrapped our capas, and rain spattered off the maguey plants. But the sun came back and chased the clouds away.

We watched the hasty retreat of the rain across the valley. Steam billowed up from the earth like smoke after a battle. The heat was intense. We gulped mouthfuls of water and wiped our brows.

The clouds returned with broadsides of wind and the sun gave way. We dived again into the capas. But only for a dozen minutes. The sun's forces were stubborn. They held and advanced again.

Thus the battle raged all through the long day. Back and forth above the contested valley, steamed the warring ships of the sky. Down on our heads, in their turn, beat shots of rain and searing rays of heat.

At noon we stopped under the ramada of a ranch-house, falling in ruins, and ate sardines and galletas.

Then out again into the battlefield of the elements, we rode toward Vanegas, the half-way point.

An aged herdsman stood in the brush at the side of the trail. "*¿Tienen cerillos, señores?*" he asked—"have you matches?"

Bob tossed him a box. It had stopped raining and we dismounted for a smoke with the old man. The three of us sat on our heels, underneath the cool, damp mesquite bushes. The ancient son of David smiled at us from kindly eyes above a wrinkled and gray bewhiskered face.

He seemed entirely oblivious of our foreign extraction. He spoke of the weather, of the trail, of our horses; he asked about the crops north of El Salado; he mentioned an injury to one of his goats, which had fallen into a ditch, and the seasonal increase he expected in his flock.

He did not, however, mention the country from which we had come. It is possible that he knew of no other land than the one of his birth. It was more probable, I thought, that years of communion with vast silences had cleansed him of the petit jealousies and rivalries of persons given less time for introspection.

Over his white, cotton clothing, the herdsman wore an apron of goat skin, the hairy side turned inward. Sandals on his feet, a straw sombrero and a sarape, to protect him from the rain and cold, completed his attire. Food was carried in a leather pouch over his shoulder. A short knife at his belt, and a staff and sling in hand, were his only weapons.

The sling, made of a square of leather and two long

strands of *agave* fibers, was fastened at one end about his wrist. The leather "pocket" was large enough to hold a stone the size of a baseball.

While we were visiting the herdsman, a rabbit hopped out of the brush, approximately fifty yards away. The old man placed a pebble in his sling. He whistled shrilly, and, as the animal looked toward the source of the sound, he whirled the weapon one time about his head and released the stone with a back lash of his wrist.

The rabbit was knocked flat by the missile, and did not move after he was struck.

"Do you carry the sling to kill game for your food?" Bob asked.

"Sí, señor. And to protect the goats. There are wolves here in the valley, and mountain lions in the sierra."

We had ridden but a few kilometers farther south, when we witnessed the truth of his statement. As we approached a water hole, three large, gray wolves trotted away into the brush.

The condition of Bob's stomach, and the crude accommodations offered by Vanegas, after we reached it, greatly curtailed the long-anticipated celebration. We engaged a room, a bed and a candle at the Hotel Mexico. At a *boteca*—pharmacy—we purchased a bottle of milk of magnesia. At a fruit market, we found figs, sadly shriveled, and apples no larger around than a half dollar. We returned to the hotel and ordered boiled milk and crackers for Bob, and a dinner, with cold beer for me.

The "fiesta", however, was not completely devoid of blessings. The milk of magnesia cured Bob of his ills,

and the glass of beer gave me an appetite that made a meal of eggs, beans and tortillas almost as welcome as the feast we had planned.

The real celebration, I think, occurred at the black and white marker bearing the numerals 722. The ships of the sun were advancing above us. To the east a dark swirl of clouds indicated the swift retreat of the rain. Evidence of its fierce resistance ran in stream or hung in quivering drops upon our raincoats and from the brims of our sombreros. The horses glistened with dampness.

Less than half a kilometer ahead might be seen the walls of a pueblo. Immediately before us was a railway marker.

"It's 722," Bob exclaimed.

"It sure is." I tried to suppress a grin.

We rode silently until we were exactly even with the metal sign. Another step and we would have passed it. That step was not taken. A witness would have sworn an invisible hand reached out and checked our progress at the same instant. We looked at each other and laughed. We turned and looked at the trail behind us. Distant places were hidden behind a purple veil. The rain had given up the fight. But night had appeared on the field and the sun, too, was in full retreat. For a moment we stood there, silent. I felt a tightening about my chest. I glanced around at Bob. He was watching me. I pushed my right hand from under the folds of the capa and extended it toward him.

"Well, we're half way, general. I hope the remainder is as pleasant."

His Oriental face opened with a brilliance that rivaled the western light at his back. He sidled his horse toward me and our hands met, warmly, strongly—the East and the West, brothers in the quest for the secret of the incongruity that is Mexico.

"Suicide to ride through northern Mexico!" Bob laughed. "I would like to see John Whittaker now. 'Ground glass and carbolic acid,' in my hat!

"We have ridden half way," he continued. "Give me ten reasons why we can't ride the other half."

"There must be ten," I answered. "But somehow I can't think of one. It's an old Irish custom."

We rode into Vanegas.

*The American Family of Morgan
Reigns . . Over the Compound at Wadley . . .*

CHAPTER XX

THE American family of Morgan reigns, with becoming dignity, over the compound at the industrial town of Wadley, in the state of San Luis Potosí. Mr. Morgan's initials have escaped me, but the aroma of his pipe tobacco remains in my memory, as do his slow smile, the lock of hair that strayed down over his forehead, and his Texas drawl, evident even when he spoke Spanish. His son, the one who was home for the summer vacation, is called John.

John, only a few years ago, was a Boy Scout in Del Río, Texas. He plays tennis with great enthusiasm, possesses a faultless sense of sportsmanship and courtesy, and appears fated to be as generous and likable as his father.

Mrs. Morgan is large, black haired and beaming; persistently the hostess. However, she seems to mother, in a distant sort of way, every human being that comes within her ken.

But there is an edge to her maternal air that makes one wonder if she does not wield the domestic peach-tree limb behind the scenes. Mr. Morgan always leaves his carefully and thickly crusted briars at the office when he goes home—and he seems small and humble without the wreaths of smoke about his head.

We arrived at the Wadley compound from Vanegas on Saturday afternoon. We remained there Saturday night and Sunday for dinner before riding on to Berrendo Sunday night.

Wadley is a smelter town. The company which controls it is English owned, Mr. Morgan told us. The metal smelted is antimony. It is dug high in the mountains east of the compound. On a clear day a person can stand at Wadley and look up two thousand feet—and five miles away—and see a pennant fluttering from its staff above a golf course green. Over this course, the mining engineer, the only white man at the diggings, plays a daily round, dressed in knickers and plaid sox.

Once there were many workers in and around the compound at Wadley. Now the mill is closed and only the Morgans, and a Mexican engineer and his young wife live inside the walls. On the outside are clustered the temporary shelters of the Indians, awaiting the return of industry—or the desert.

The storekeeper at Catorce, where we stopped for lunch, told us of Wadley and of the Morgans. As we sat on the counter, eating sardines and crackers, he described the glory that once was Catorce's and Wadley's and Matahuala's, an ancient city of the sierras.

He pointed to a row of long gray sheds, silent, doors barred. There had been a tequila factory, he said, and many were the sorrows that had been drowned in the sparkling streams that flowed from its vats. He pointed across the square to the deserted store buildings and the houses crumbling back to earth. With flourish-

ing hands and an agile tongue, he painted a scene filled with bustling, busy humanity surging in the wake of a boom.

Antimony had been scarce, and valuable, in the world's markets. And the heart of the Sierra Madre Oriental was filled with the metal, the merchant declared. "But now it has lost its value. It has been caught in the world-wide economic stagnation. It has left to poverty the towns it once made rich."

A big mestizo, in blue overalls and a slouch hat, admitted us to the compound at Wadley. Bob stayed with the horses, while I entered the office to introduce myself to Mr. Morgan. The aroma of his pipe prepared me for the smile on his face when he looked up from behind a broad, flat-topped desk.

He spoke in Spanish until I told him I was an American. I explained who we were and what we were doing in Mexico. He put aside his work and walked with me to the horses, to meet Bob.

He called a servant and had rooms prepared for us. He accompanied us to the headquarters' house and introduced us to his wife and John. We told them all the news we had received from the United States and they, in turn, shared their knowledge of current events, gleaned from papers several days old.

John asked if we played tennis. We both admitted that we had played. If twenty-three days in the saddle had not left our legs too bowed to run, we told him, we would enjoy a couple of sets. John rushed out, and back with three rackets.

On the court, Bob and I removed our boots and played in our bare feet. I never was an exceptional tennis player but the long ride had made me hard and lithe, and my greater reach gave me an advantage over John. Bob is a sufferer of myopia, and tennis is not his game. I won every set, by narrow margins. Victory made me feel exceedingly young, exceedingly hopeful and exceedingly happy. I issued from the shower, filled with vigor and confidence.

The bride of the Mexican engineer ate dinner with us at the Morgans'. Her husband was away on a trip into the mountains. She was small, and compellingly feminine. Her skin was white and smooth, her hair as black as the sateen frock which cuddled close to her body. She laughed, a delicious tinkle like tiny fingers on piano keys in the stillness of the night.

Mrs. Morgan was teaching her to speak English, she said, and she practiced it on me. I never knew a bite I ate. She and her husband lived across the garden, in the room next to Bob's, I learned.

After dinner, we rode in the Morgans' car high in the mountains, along a road that led to a cable terminal, where aerial cars brought ore from the mines at the top of the sierra.

Below and above us, twinkled lights from mountain villages; and the breeze from the pines was like perfume in our desert-weary nostrils.

We coasted home in the moonlight, out of the chill of the high places, through a flurry of rain, and down into the warm, still valley.

Soft rays billowed in at my window, and I looked

across the garden at the darkened square of glass but one removed from the door where Bob was quartered. I seemed to hear distant laughter, like the tinkle of tiny fingers on piano keys. I went to bed but sleep failed me.

John Morgan called me at six o'clock and we played a set of tennis before breakfast. The day, although there never had been a calendar, would have proclaimed itself Sunday. Calm and peaceful and bright, it spread over the stone compound, set in the vastness of desert and mountains.

A dozen small boys with newly washed faces gathered about us under the porch of the Morgan home. Their clothes were clean, though often patched; their shoes, which caused them to walk with unusual awkwardness, had been greased; and their hair, without exception, had been plastered close to their heads.

"Mexican Boy Scouts," Mr. Morgan explained proudly.

"They naturally are far more advanced in camp craft and nature study than are American boys. Some of them are clever at handicraft, too." He called two of the boys forward. One of them had a contraption for twisting rope; the other carried a handful of hempen fibers. The machine was set up, and we witnessed a rope-making demonstration.

"Of course these boys have many traits which are objectionable to an American," Mr. Morgan continued. "Their inheritance is more primitive. The oaths we stress most are: 'A Scout is helpful, courteous, kind—and clean'."

"You seem to have worked wonders with that last

one," Bob assured him. "These are the cleanest boys we have seen in Mexico."

"I always have taken a great interest in boys," Mr. Morgan said. "I guess I'm pretty much of one, myself. In Del Río, I led a troop. And both my boys are Eagle Scouts. When I came here I saw no reason why I shouldn't continue my Scout activity.

"Mexican boys are much like those of the United States—and of any other country, I suppose. Perhaps they are a bit more serious minded, a little older for their years. They have to work hard, and they mature more rapidly. Here, the minimum age for a Scout is ten, instead of twelve, years.

"But they have the same interests as American boys, although the Indian restlessness has left its mark. After you learn to know them, you find among them counterparts of boys you once played with." He indicated a round-faced, bright-eyed fellow. "Paco is our clown. He is as full of pranks as the red-headed, freckled kid in your troop, when you were a Scout. Miguel is silent and serious. Carlos provides for his blind grandmother. The big one, there, lives in the hills about three miles from here. He is strong as an ox. In fact, he ran all the way here, to meet you. But the others out-think him. They boss him around, and he seems to like it. The little fellow there by him, is his lord and master." Mr. Morgan laughed, but it was a proud laugh.

He called his Scouts to attention. They saluted and repeated their oath and laws, in Spanish. They sang the Mexican national anthem. Then they filed by us, shaking hands gravely, and ran, jostling and pushing,

snatching caps and tripping each other, out of the compound.

"Mother wants some fresh meat for dinner," John advised his father. So we strolled out of the compound to the native markets. A red flag flying from a door indicated a butcher shop. A big, mustached man, in a bloody apron, bowed low and wiped his hands. The uncovered carcasses of sheep, goats and cows hung from the rafters in the wooden stall. The sun streamed in on them and flies buzzed about in undulating smudges.

"I would like half of a young kid, freshly killed. Do you have one?" Mr. Morgan asked.

"But, yes, *jefe*. I will send a boy to kill one. *Jesús*," he kicked at a sleeping youth on the floor behind him, "the *jefe* desires a freshly killed *cabron*. Hurry." The youth slouched away. "Was there something else, *jefe*? I have much nice meat." He waved at the fly-clustered quarters hanging from the rafters.

"No, *gracias*. The kid will be sufficient. We are but few." Mr. Morgan smiled.

The butcher bowed again. "Yes, *jefe*."

The youth, called *Jesús*, trotted by, the smoking carcass of a young goat over his shoulder. "I will send the half to your house, *jefe*." Again the butcher bowed. We wished him *adiós* and returned to the compound.

The engineer's young wife was with us again at dinner. John had trouble carving his meat and a bone slipped clattering from his plate. The woman laughed, long and clearly and innocently. She sounded very much like an ill-mannered child. Mrs. Morgan peered at her

sternly across the table. I became deeply concerned with the pattern of my coffee cup.

The way from Wadley led into barrenness, across the Tropic of Cancer into the Torrid Zone. But it was cold and damp, and dark blanketed the earth with invisibility, when we arrived at the railroad section house at Berrendo.

We made our bed between the rails in a tool house, and slept soundly, with only a piece of canvas between us and the cross ties.

*Pulque . . . is Called
The National Drink of Mexico.*

CHAPTER XXI

PULQUE, a beverage fermented from the juice of the maguey plant, is called the national drink of Mexico. Every hacienda had its *fábrica de pulque*, every village its pulque shop. This liquor is to the Mexican what beer is to a German or wine to a native of France.

Its origin is lost in the darkened corridors of antiquity. Examples of its potency are cited in dozens of national legends. One of the most popular of these stories relates how the god, Quetzalcoatl, became drunk and wandered away, never to be seen again. The pulque which intoxicated him was given by his fellow deity, Tetcatlapoco, who was jealous of his ability as a ball player!

Bob and I had our first experience with pulque at the Estación Venado,—and our last experience with waiting room floors at the same place.

Venado is just one day south of Berrendo, *a caballo*. We left Berrendo in the cold, gray dawn. We arrived at Venado in the middle of an alternate black and white afternoon.

We approached the village through fields of maguey, a cousin of the cactus, which is used by the native, not only in making pulque but as food, and for roofing his jacal. Also its fibers are sold to rope factories, or woven into a coarse cloth for making clothes.

Around the many plats of the liquor and fiber producing plants stood tall hedges of prickly pear, some of them rising to a height of twenty feet or more. The green of these living fences was splashed with the deep red of ripening fruit.

Four men were kneeling on the earth before a jacal. Their hands and mouths were stained crimson. They laughed and shouted. As we passed they called to us to stop and join their party. One of them held a jar aloft. "Plenty to drink," he shouted. Another of them dug his hands into a basket and drew forth a half dozen of the cactus pears, dripping red juice. "Plenty to eat." A third arose to his feet and stumbled toward us. His toe caught under the tongue of a two-wheeled cart and he sprawled on the ground. From an outstretched hand rolled two large, green dice. On the top surface of one of the cubes were two white spots, on the other there were five. The fallen man looked up at us, and a grin spread across his fruit-stained face. "Plenty of money," he chuckled.

We declined, and continued on our way.

The southbound train was due. Dozens of Indians, men and women, stood about, waiting to peddle their wares when the coaches stopped. Some had hand-woven baskets filled with peaches and other fruits. Some had white cheeses. The *tacos* salesmen were there, as were the women with broken pieces of boiled chicken served atop a large tortilla.

A nourishing lunch might be had for twenty-five centavos—about eight cents.

There were several women with large, earthen jars on

their shoulders or held firmly between their feet. I glanced into one of these containers, and it seemed to be filled with fresh milk upon which the foam remained.

"*¿Leche?*" I asked.

"No. *Pulque, señor, ¿Quiere tomar?*"

"How much is it?"

"Ten centavos." She pointed to a one-liter cup.

I turned to Bob. "Let's try a shot of the 'divine liquor', what do you say?"

"I'm in favor." We tossed off a brimming cupful each.

It had a slightly yeasty, slightly sour taste, distantly akin to beer. It seemed solid, rich with nourishment, and it brought warm sensations that spread in pleasant tremors through my veins. The day's fatigue receded. New strength poured into my limbs.

We entered the station, met the agent and gained permission to turn our horses into the empty cattle pens. We threw saddles and packs into the waiting room, and came out to see the "Sunset Limited" thunder in from the border.

There were Americans in the last two coaches. They gazed from the windows with unseeing eyes. I waved to them, removed my hat, donned my most youthful and most "gringo" smile. No response. My countrymen turned their serious faces back to the books they were reading, knowing nothing they had looked upon. I wondered if they knew more of the story recorded on the printed pages.

The train slipped away. The peddlers pocketed their

coins, hoisted the remainder of their goods to shoulders or heads and trudged away.

A strange group walked across a field to the station: Four small Indian girls, in long, drab skirts, greasy hair plaited, eyes downcast; and with them was a young woman as pretty as a desert flower, graceful as the wind in the grasses on the plains. She wore a tiny, maroon turban on her head, and soft, brown hair peeped from under it, issuing forth more brazenly at the back, to curl into a knot that rested low on her neck. She wore a dress of heavy crepe, almost brown, almost gold.

She was as slender as the painting of Xochil, who bore the first pulque to the king of Texcoco and became his bride.

Her shoes were high heeled, her hose silk; the Indian girls, two of whom walked with their arms about her, were bare footed.

Bob and I climbed up and sat on the fence of the cattle pens. The last of the peddlers had gone, but not before we had drunk again of the pulque. The four Indian girls attempted to walk the rails. The regal young lady with them also attempted, but ladies' pumps were never designed for such a pastime. Bob and I watched her and laughed. One of her companions walked brazenly up to me.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"I am an Americano."

Suddenly in first-spoken English, "w'at ees jour nam'?" I told her, and asked her where she learned my language. She did not understand my question and I

had to repeat it in Spanish. "I study English at school," she answered, "but it is very difficult."

She giggled and pointed slyly toward the señorita. "My cousin is pleased with you. She told me to learn your name." I felt myself becoming warm under the collar. The child ran away. Bob laughed and poked me in the ribs. I almost fell off the fence. I looked toward the beautiful lady. She was staring intently at a pile of cinders near the depot.

"Why don't you go toss her a rose, Romeo?"

"Why don't you laugh yourself to death, Charlie Chan? I'm going to give the dolly a break." I walked toward her. She turned and strolled slowly away, in the direction of the station. I started to follow but the Indian girl stopped me.

"Where are you going?" the child asked. "Where have you come from? In what state of the United States do you live? Have you been to New York? How tall are the buildings there? Are all Americanos rich?"

I escaped from her barrage of questions in time to see a tall mestizo, with a pistol in his belt, walk from the depot and motion to the señorita. Accompanied by the four Indian girls, she followed him off across the field.

Even as I stood watching them go, I heard the explosion of Bob's laughter. But she turned, half way across the field, and I could have sworn she smiled at me.

A ragged, gray-bearded, old Indian, and his more ragged squaw, camped for the night under the chute of the cattle pen. They owned a scrawny, brown burro

upon which the woman rode. They were going to relatives at San Luis Potosí, they said. They had come from the cotton fields across the border.

Negra had broken the head-strap on his nose bag and was forced to finish eating his corn from the ground. A few broken grains were left in the dirt and slobber after he had done.

We were placing our saddles and blankets on the concrete floor of the waiting room, preparing a sleeping place for the night, when there came a timid tapping at the door. Bob opened it, and the gray, old Indian stood before him, hat in hand. "Pardon me, señor. May I gather up the corn your horse has wasted?"

Bob, of course, assented and the man pattered away, murmuring a thousand thanks. We supposed he wanted the grain for his burro.

We wandered out into the darkness, and the Indian's campfire drew us. The old woman was squatting in the dirt, a stone metate between her knees, grinding the broken bits of corn into the *masa*, or paste, from which tortillas are made. Tortillas are Mexico's bread, the staff of life.

Bob drew a handful of coins from his pocket and thrust them on the aged man. We walked back to the station, the concrete floor, and blessed sleep.

For approximately three weeks, our regular noonday diet had been sardines and *galletas*—animal crackers. They are the only prepared foods always carried in stock by the small tiendas in Mexican villages and ranches.

Occasionally we were able to supplement this fare

with raisins, five-centavo boxes of Sun Maid raisins from California, for dessert. Always we kept coffee in the pack and canteens filled with water.

At Venado our larder was replenished. When we left the station I carried two liters of *galletas* inside my shirt, and Bob had a can of sardines in each hip pocket.

We began climbing from the low, flat mountain valley, back into the sierra. By night, we hoped to reach the Rancho Bocas. The way was hot and still. Dust was kicked up from the horses' hoofs but refused to rise, and hung sullenly along the ground. The prickly pear plants grew larger and more frequent. The mesquite stood in thickets and more closely approached tree size than did that farther north.

At noon we stopped in a shaded place where the cactus grew twenty feet tall, and clusters of beans, six inches long, hung from the thorny bushes. There were tufts of dry, brown grass, and the horses were staked to graze while we ate of our usual diet, and rested an hour.

As we half reclined on saddle blankets and fished sardines from the olive oil in which they were canned, Bob was unusually silent. His brows were close drawn and he appeared to be deep in thought.

After I had eaten my can of sardines and a carefully divided half of the *galletas*, I walked over to the pack and poured out two cups of water from the canteen. When I returned and handed him a cup, Bob looked up at me, and great seriousness was written upon his countenance.

He held one of the tiny silver fish by the tail, between

two fingers, and allowed it to drop into his mouth. He chewed a moment, thoughtfully, and said:

"Some day, colonel, we'll write a book about this country. I have been giving it long and careful consideration, and I think of no more appropriate title than, 'Sardines and Animal Crackers'."

*The Hacienda at Bocas
Clings to the Lip of a Mountain Pass . . .*

CHAPTER XXII

THE hacienda at Bocas clings to the lip of a mountain pass, like some ancient citadel guarding the approach to the capital, San Luis Potosí.

Not many years ago the rancho was a center of social, cultural, agricultural and industrial progress, a veritable city-state asking nothing of the outside world but a market for selling its bountiful surplus, and from which it might satisfy its taste for beauty and luxury.

Once its stables were filled with fine horses, its fields with green corn; the ancient church, under a vaulted dome made of a single stone, glittered with gold and silver, and never knew darkness; from the grilles windows of the casa grande came the laughter of children and the sighs of lovers; flowers once filled the patio and the walled garden.

The music of a contented people once stirred the air of early evening, at the Rancho Bocas. There were wealth, beauty and, often, festivity.

But these were for only the few. Hundreds of ignorant peons were forced to live and slave in poverty. Their labor and the fruit of their loins formed the foundation. Their bodies, and that part of them which might have been souls, blanketed the mire, that their masters might walk with eyes turned to the sun.

A system built on blood is tottering in Mexico, after four hundred years. The Indians are being given the lands on which they formerly were forced to labor for others. Schools are being built. Methods of agriculture are being taught.

"It is the revolution, señor."

But surely the revolution is not intended as an instrument of wanton destruction. Yet it would seem so to the stranger, to whom is visible only idleness and cultural disintegration. The factories of Bocas were silent. The doors of its church were barred and not even the tears of pious candles warmed its shrine. The rooms of the *casa grande* had been stripped of their furnishings, their libraries and their valuable art collections. Its windows were shuttered and silent. Only a federal "receiver" in khaki, a man of all work and an aged vaquero inhabited it, and to them the remnants of its *grandeur* did not exist.

To the receiver it was an agrarian project—a book of red and blue figures. To the man of all work it was a drudge rewarded only by the stern, unsmiling faces of insufficient silver coins.

To the aged vaquero it was the twilight that led to the grave. He continued to live in the early régime. His evening stories were of the master, the fine horses, the caballeros who came riding to the ball, the queenly women, laughter and song.

"Then there was happiness, señores. The Indians gathered on the plain at the foot of the hill, and swayed and danced to the music that drifted from the open doors." The old man pointed to the terrace before the

grilled windows. "There were little tables there, and many cushioned chairs. Lanterns were hung across the plaza. The gentlemen and ladies sat at the tables and drank fragrant wines.

"We, of the household, dressed as for the holiday, and for every small service we received a silver peso. Often we, too, danced and sang, out there in the plaza. Then the master showered us with coins, and the guests clapped their hands. We laughed then, señores, but now I have not laughed in many years."

The aged vaquero buckled on his leather apron, coiled his rope and swung proudly into the saddle on a horse that took my breath away.

A sparkle was in the old man's eyes. He caressed the prancing animal. "He, also is of the old day, señor. His father bore my master for many years. His blood flows in an unsullied stream from the plains of Arabia. But now he and I must go into the hills and find cows and goats to add in the jefe's book.

"It is the revolution, señor.

"First they dammed our stream, high in the mountain, that our fields would no longer grow. My master's children were sent to school in the capital and never have returned. Now they force those of us who do not work in the fields, to search in the hills for dogie calves. They do it, they say, to free the Indian from peonage.

"Every man is to receive free land, they say, señor. But I have seen nothing given. Always they take and take. They send a man to keep the account in the books, to sell our produce,—and to send the money to the capital. Always they take and take. Soon nothing will be

left but empty walls and fleshless bones. But I will join my master before that come, señores.

"Adiós." The noble animal, and the little man hidden under a huge sombrero, clattered out through the fallen arches of the vacant stable.

We arrived at Bocas while the Indians at the foot of the hill were lighting their evening fires, and the burros and oxen stood in long rows before the watering trough at the base of the wall. We waited our turn that Negra and Pistole might nuzzle in the cool water, shoulder to shoulder with the little gray mules.

In a native café, open to the elements, an aged woman was squatting on her heels, blowing the fire to life. A child was rolling paste for tortillas.

A street of stone stepped up to the plaza. We stopped a moment to gossip with a shopkeeper. We asked about obtaining shelter. He thought the jefe at the *casa grande* would give us quarters, he said.

The jefe proved to be the government representative, a man of deeply furrowed brow. He was dressed in khaki and wore high, lace boots. A revolver was strapped to his thigh; a pen was held behind his ear. He read the letter we brought from the governor of Coahuila. He called the man of all work and ordered him to prepare us a room. The aged vaquero came and led the horses away. "We have very little here to offer at present," the jefe said. "But you are welcome to what there is. Most of the house has been locked several months, and most of the furniture is gone. I am sorry we can not do more."

"You are very kind, señor."

The mozo crossed the patio with an armful of bedding and we followed him into a room musty with the smell of places long shut against sunshine and fresh air. He threw open the broad windows and set up a dusty bedstead. He went out and returned with a candle. "The electric lights no longer work," he said.

He showed us to the bath, with its sunken, granite tub and its shower that filled an entire room, but from which the water had ceased to flow.

The mozo had worn a greasy, striped shirt when we arrived but, while we exclaimed over the grandeur that once had been Bocas', he hurried away and returned wearing a starched, white jacket, and an expansive smile. "Señores," he apologized, "meals no longer are prepared in the kitchens of the hacienda, but if there is anything I can get you. . . . There is a fondita at the foot of the hill."

The Indian woman, from the native inn, and her girl child brought a basket of food: Spanish rice, half of a creamy, white cheese, milk, frijoles, white rolls, fresh tomatoes and slices of cold, crisp beef. The mozo brought a table, napkins, glasses and silver. He set the table, poured the milk, held our chairs as we sat down, and quietly withdrew into the shadows while we ate.

The entire meal and the service cost approximately fifty cents in American currency.

We left the mozo to clear up the table and return the dishes to the inn, and we walked out into the clean, quiet night for a smoke and a breath of air before bedtime.

A light was burning in the office of the closed mescal

factory across the plaza. It wavered and flickered. Shadows crossed and recrossed before it. Suddenly the scream of a clarinet ripped the silence to threads; a bass horn roared a challenge; saxophones and cymbals joined in the brutal violation of serenity.

Someone sitting on a stone bench near the doorway of the casa grande, flipped a lighted cigarette into the dark and walked toward us, spurs tinkling on the stones of the terrace.

"Buenas noches, señor."

"Buenas noches, caballeros." It was the old vaquero.

"What is this noise?" Bob asked.

"It is the children of the Indians. The government says they must be educated. They must make unholy sounds on brass horns. They must drive honest people crazy with the roar of drums. The sweet music of the guitar and violin finds no place in this madness.

"It is a part of the agrarian program, señores."

There was bitterness in his voice, and he passed on through the archway to the stable, mumbling to himself.

Sunlight was streaming beneath the columns of the patio when we awoke. We dressed and splashed cold water in our faces, from a cracked pitcher standing on a granite-topped washstand. We walked out to the stable and found the horses munching fresh, green hay. The mozo came and called us to breakfast. We followed him through a second patio, in which flowers were blooming, but where a white, stone fountain was dry and dusty.

In the dining room there was an oil painting of a handsome woman and two children sitting on a stone

bench. Behind them was the fountain of the second patio, and sparkling jets of water played from it. In the background a cascade of bougainvillea blossoms fell from roof to floor.

There were other paintings of banquet scenes, fruits and slender glasses of wine. The woodwork was deeply carved with the leaves, bunches and tendrils of the grape. On the long, narrow table, an urn of coffee and a napkin-lined, silver basket of sweet rolls were awaiting us. The mozo also brought the remainder of our white cheese, and cut it in thin, appetizing slices.

Through the uncurtained windows, which extended from ceiling to floor, a wild growth of flowers and shrubs was visible. After eating, we looked more closely and found that a garden once flourished there. The servant unlocked one of the windows and led us down a flight of slender, iron steps to the almost overrun paths that meandered about from fountain to pavilion, from hidden bench to moss-grown shrine.

Around the garden was a vine-covered wall that shut the desert out. Roses and flowering shrubs grew in thoughtless confusion. Yellow lilies blanketed a shaded corner; lime trees bloomed under the morning sun; and the crimson splash of the bougainvillea spread everywhere, like a smile on a joyous face.

Even as we walked from the garden, the sun faded. The horses were waiting, and we rode away from El Rancho Bocas, out of the dying beauty of a more tranquil time, and the rain came on in torrents.

Through fallen and deserted villages, between broken

rock walls and across mountains, jagged and bare, we rode in the storm toward San Luis Potosí, a colonial city, three hundred years old.

*Insulting the Mexican Army . . .
Is Not the Most Healthful Pastime . . .*

CHAPTER XXIII

INSULTING the Mexican army, even though unintentionally, is not the most healthful pastime for gringos abroad in the land. It all transpired so suddenly, Bob and I never quite decided if our insult was intentional or otherwise.

We arrived in San Luis Potosí late in the afternoon, following one of the most trying of the twenty-seven days that had elapsed since we left the border. We were tired and dirty, wet through and filled with hunger that had accumulated since breakfast. Our horses were so exhausted they caused half a dozen traffic jams as we were shunted back and forth all over the city, seeking a place to shelter them for a day or two before continuing to Mexico City.

After we had been misdirected, shouted at, laughed at, and sworn at by a score of policemen, we developed a passionate dislike for anyone in uniform. That probably had some bearing on the army insulting episode.

Finally a stable was found for the horses and, after meeting several members of the American colony in the city, we dragged our travel-weary bodies to the Hotel Espana, and engaged a room and bath.

Next morning, rested and refreshed, we walked to the state capitol to see the governor and request a letter

of introduction to ranch owners and civic officials with whom we might come in contact after leaving San Luis Potosí.

Many persons were waiting to see the governor, when Bob and I arrived at the state house. We took our place with the others.

Immediately before us, in the line formed outside the door to the executive chamber, were two men in the uniforms of army officers. One of them was but slightly more than five feet tall, and weighed, I estimated, one hundred and ten pounds. His uniform was immaculate, of excellent quality whipcord; his swagger cap was tilted over one eye; and his boots—we stared long at his boots—were of English workmanship, fitted snugly about his calf and appeared as dainty as a dancing girl's pumps on his feet. They could not have been larger than a size three.

Bob and I, both exceeding five feet, eleven inches in height and one hundred and fifty pounds in weight, and filled with a feeling of virility and physical confidence brought out of the desert, probably showed our contempt as we stared at the almost feminine form of the diminutive gentleman.

"Do you suppose he is an officer in the Mexican army?" Bob asked, in English.

"He is almost large enough to be a Boy Scout," I answered.

The little man and his companion stepped from the line and departed.

In the meantime, the anteroom to the governor's office had become crowded. After approximately an

hour's wait, Bob and I found ourselves before the inner door. We had seen the line before us diminish slowly, in irregular jerks, and, by rights, it was our turn to cross the portal. But the doorkeeper held us back and called someone else to precede us. We waited, and again we were held back.

This procedure was repeated several times. I became impatient. Bob asked the doorman why we were not permitted to enter in our turn. He answered, savagely and with no respect for our aesthetic natures, that we might remain there until he was "——good and ready to let us in."

There was a long line back of us, and the room was filled with persons who laughed every time we were repulsed.

Again the doorman appeared. And again he pushed us back and called the man from behind us forward. An undercurrent of mirth swept through the crowd.

I reached for the doorman and dragged him out by the collar. Bob quietly took the handle of the door in one hand, shoved back the man who started to pass him, with the other, stepped calmly inside and turned the knob.

The struggle lasted only a moment. Bob was inside talking to the governor, who was not aware of what had happened at his very door. I released my victim and stepped out on a balcony off the anteroom, for a breath of air. Everybody in the room was looking out at me. Their faces were not friendly.

I turned my back and, leaning my elbows on the iron grill of the balcony, looked out across the plaza, a story

below. I gave only a glance from the corner of my eye when a man walked out beside me. He, too, leaned his elbows on the grill.

"You are Americano?" he asked.

"Yes. Where did you learn to speak English?"

"Many years I live in the United States. Sometime I go back. I like it. I make much money there. What are you doing here?"

"My friend and I are newspapermen—periodistas," I answered. "We are seeing the country mostly. We may attempt to reach Mexico City in time to attend the World Press Congress early next month."

"Yours is interesting work," he said. "I have friends in the United States who are periodistas."

I began to like the man. His quiet, intelligent manner and speech inspired confidence. He was slightly past middle age, and was dressed neatly in gray tweed and a soft felt hat. We spoke together several minutes, and I forgot my trouble with the doorman. The little gentleman with the child-sized boots had marched from my thoughts long since.

There was a commotion in the room. I faced about. Coming toward the balcony, and me, was a group of six or eight men, wearing army officers' uniforms and carrying automatic pistols at their belts. The straps used to secure the guns in their holsters were unbuckled.

Leading this war-like crew, his face flushed with anger, his arms swinging, was our friend—none other—the diminutive soldier, about whom, I admit, Bob and I had attempted some very poor wit.

They came on, threat in their stride, profanity falling from their lips in a flood too swift for me to follow.

I backed up against the grill of the balcony. There was no escape. It was twenty-five feet to the pavement below. There was only one door to the anteroom and the dainty, little officer and his squad of gunmen were blocking that.

I lifted my foot and planted it firmly against one of the bars behind me. I was facing them, scared, praying for peace, ready to fight, knowing I did not have a chance, but waiting.

Then they were all about me, swearing and gesticulating violently. I caught the words "damned gringoes," and "insulting the army of Mexico," all in Spanish. I shifted my foot against the grill. My arms were taut against the top rail of the balcony.

I planned to use the foot as a spring. I was watching for an opening when I might shove myself suddenly into them, propelled forward by a backward thrust of my boot against the grill, and attempt to batter a way through with my fists.

My body was tensed. I was breathing hard. I saw nothing but a ring of distorted faces and unstrapped pistols. Hard, fighting words were lashed into the throb at my temples.

At my side, a quiet voice spoke in Spanish. "Señores, you are wasting your time. This man does not understand a word you are saying. He speaks only English." All eyes were turned from me and I glanced swiftly about. It was my friend, he who had lived many years in the United States.

I caught my cue. Dropping my antagonistic attitude, I turned to him and asked, loudly and slowly in English: "Are these gentlemen angry about something?"

"There must be a misunderstanding," he answered. "They say you have insulted the Mexican army."

"Insulted the Mexican Army?" I gasped, and assumed an air of injury so real that, for the moment, I actually felt injured. "They have misunderstood, sir. The Mexicans are our friends. We have slept in the jacal of the Indian and the casa grande of the haciendado. We have broken bread at the tables of the wealthy and squatted on the floor to share the beans and tortillas of the poor. Everywhere we have been received with the greatest courtesy. Everywhere we have met with cordial hospitality.

"We have found in Mexico an element of warm humanness that is unknown in the United States of the north. We have only respect and admiration for Mexico and her people." I paused and my friend interpreted what I had said. My near-assailants, I could see, were impressed. Even I was impressed.

There seemed to be two of me on that balcony surrounded by armed men. One me stood aside, coldly critical, and studied what the other me was saying. And the other me was talking himself out of a precarious situation. His eyes burned with the sincerity of an actor of tragic parts. Words, soothing, non-irritant words, danced a polka from his lips. His gestures and vocal modulations, though delivered with words of a foreign tongue, were those that appeal to the Latin.

Mexicans have launched a hundred revolutions, driven

by an agile tongue and vigorously waving arms. My impassive self recalled that many ancestors of the oratorical self must have made pilgrimages to the Blarney stone.

"We are newspapermen," I continued. "Our mission in this country is to remedy a false impression which now exists in the United States, regarding Mexico and its people. Thus far we have observed only admirable traits. Our pens have written only praise of your mother soil.

"Gentlemen, if we have, in any way, insulted Mexico or her army, we apologize and I assure you it was entirely unintentional."

My friend interpreted for me, and his interpretation was sympathetic to our cause. With a few mumbled derisions, but half-ashamed, the gunmen straggled from the balcony. Their diminutive leader remained, anger dying slowly in his face, his breath exploding through clenched teeth, gradually with less frequency.

My interpreter looked at me and grinned. I was breathing hard, and my face was flushed with the fervor of my recent oratory. I winked at him.

After a while the little soldier went away, and I explained the whole episode to my friend.

In the meantime, Bob, in the governor's office was having an oral duel all his own.

Whereas, I had invaded his usual territory of half-yielding diplomacy in my verbal encounter, he was "muscling in" on my accepted policy of pugnacious aggression. I heard the entire story, in part from Bob

and in part from an American merchant who had a friend in the office of the governor.

Bob must have been "hopping mad" at the doorman, because he approached the chief executive with a chip on his shoulder.

The governor looked up at him, reprimand in his eyes. News of the "insult" episode already had reached him. "You are one of the Americanos who rode in on horseback yesterday?" he asked.

"Yes."

"You have been indiscreet in your remarks, señor. You might have been thrown in prison. In fact," he continued, "you may be yet."

With that inscrutable smile of his, Bob asked, "Do you think that could be arranged?

"My companion and I would be pleased to be held in your jail. It would make excellent news in the United States. The papers which employ us probably would raise our wages.

"It might be detrimental to your political career, however. We represent three very influential periodicals." Oriental sarcasm is subtle but unmistakable. "We will sacrifice the money we might earn, of course, to prevent your excellency from losing favor with the press."

His excellency thought a moment. "Why didn't you tell me you were periodistas?" he asked. "My men thought you were bandits. They thought you were Mexican and your friend a renegade gringo. We have had much trouble with adventurers. Surely you can see my position?"

Bob interrupted him. "Why, certainly, señor. Perhaps we all have been indiscreet. I can not blame you for your attitude toward us.

"But I came to ask you for a letter of introduction to ranch owners and civic authorities south of here. If you will be so kind. . . . I will wait while you call a secretary to write it for me."

Bob came out of the governor's office as I came off the balcony. He held up the letter and grinned. "Well, young man," he said, "I talked you out of jail and into the good graces of the chief executive of the state of San Luis Potosí."

"Yeah?" I answered. "Well, I'm no slouch at this talking business. I talked myself out of a beating and into the good graces of the army.

"Since I've got all the qualifications, maybe I ought to run for president."

*I Was in Good Physical Condition
When We Reached San Luis Potosí . . .*

CHAPTER XXIV

I WAS in good physical condition when we reached San Luis Potosí. A steady diet of sardines, crackers, eggs, beans, tortillas, raisins and bananas, combined with long days in the saddle and long nights of sound sleep, had hardened my muscles and left me lean and tough.

Bob had been ill after we left Saltillo, and I laughed at him, jokingly, when he quit eating and asked for boiled goat milk at every meal. When we left San Luis, I began to realize how he felt, and I was sorry I had laughed.

We had been hungry for many things when we reached the city. We ate rich foods, sweets and fruits. We drank good wine and pre-prandial cocktails. Our horses were given two days to rest, while we gorged and slept.

Then, the night before we departed, we had dinner—my first Japanese meal—at the home of Tokichi Umaba, merchant of San Luis Potosí and president of the city's Nipponese colony.

We went to Señor Umaba's house late in the afternoon. In a little red and gold salon, where tall, crimson flowers were visible through the open door, we drank sake, imported from the Orient, nibbled at cheese, made from shark fins, and spoke of cabbages and kings.

A silent, Japanese woman tip-toed in with a basket of fruits—pomegranates, oranges, bananas and man-goes. Apology was proclaimed in every step, and she bowed many times, deeply from the waist, when we acknowledged her introduction as Señor Umaba's wife.

She was preparing our dinner, she said. We, of course, would remain.

Umaba directed us to a room and the bath.

As we undressed, Bob told me of the customs of his country. I must make a loud noise with my tea, to indicate that I was enjoying it. I must pass my plate to the hostess with both hands.

The bath, he warned me, was Japanese style. I must sit submerged to my neck in boiling water, while flames coiled about inside the cement casement that formed the tub.

But I must bathe before entering the tub. I must lather myself and rinse while standing in the center of the bathroom floor. Then I must get in the boiler of the tub and stew as long as I could bear the heat. After emerging, I must rinse with cold water, splashed from a pan, and wipe myself dry with a damp cloth.

All this I did. While I lathered, Bob stewed; while I stewed, Bob rinsed.

Black and white striped kimonos and long, black silk sashes were hanging outside the door of the bathroom. Single-thonged sandals, made of grass, were on the floor. The kimonos and sandals were for us to wear to dinner, Señor Umaba announced.

The immodest dress, the stewing process in the bath

and my greed at the table, all contributed, I think, to my subsequent illness.

We ate soup, made from shreds of dried tuna fish; more of the shark-fin cheese; boiled cubes of pork, cooked until they were white, garnished with long green beans; rice, dry and containing hidden bits of tender meats; radishes pickled in salt water; and a dozen side dishes and an extra course or two, at the identity of which I only could guess.

Hunger made me master of the chop sticks and I ate of everything placed before me. I drank many cups of pale yellow tea and many glasses of rich rice wine.

A Japanese boy, in blue overalls, came in while we were eating the fruit. He played strange music on an Oriental flute. I stretched myself, and pleasant tremors spread through me as the shrill notes of the instrument trickled into my consciousness and adjusted themselves to synchronize with the beat of my heart; but my stomach was distended uncomfortably.

We sat until bedtime with the Umabas. Then, substituting our own clothing for the kimonos and sandals, we walked out of the Orient into the narrow streets and drab walls of San Luis Potosí at night. At the door we must bow repeatedly, and echo compliments and various expressions of gratitude.

My stomach still was uncomfortable when we arose in the dark of early morning, following a worse than sleepless night, and rode again southward.

We stopped at a pueblo, half inhabited and half in ruins, to buy sweet bread for breakfast. The rolls were

filled with *queso de tuna* (cactus cheese), a faintly licorice-tasting paste. Although I felt hunger, I hurled the food away.

At noon I stretched out on the ground, in the shade of a prickly pear. Nausea crept upward from the area of greatest pains in my abdomen. And sickness tore the pain from me.

Our trail from San Luis led into the hinterland, away from the beaten path to a region where an Americano is as foreign as would be an Australian bushman in Central Park.

Night found us on the ancient camino real, now passable, with safety, only to those who travel on foot. Our horses were able to progress only at the slowest walk. Time and again, we were forced to dismount and lead them over rough places, or move a pile of boulders that they might advance at all.

Clouds had been gathering all afternoon, and a cold, gusty shower of rain caught us as we were nearing an isolated hill village.

Sandaled feet had picked the least precarious way through the boulder-strewn road, and we had followed the path they had worn. Now, with the houses of the village before us, we found a high stone wall across our course. A person on foot might have scrambled over the barrier and continued his journey. But for a horse to attempt such a climb would have resulted in a broken leg, at least.

We got down to clear the road. The rain was increas-

ing rapidly. Feverishly, we worked at the heavy boulders. Fingers bled, leaving pink trails on insensible porphyry; nails were broken and torn away.

Illness had not quit me completely. Often I must straighten up from moving a particularly heavy stone and let the rain beat in my face, to drive away the dizziness.

Slowly, inch by inch, we dug through, and clambered over the final rocky stretches to the village. We did not replace the wall we had broken. There was no apparent reason for its existence. I was unable to drag myself into the saddle until Bob gave me a hand.

We slept that night in the once-comfortable home of a widow, a woman of much lighter complexion than her neighbors, of whom she spoke as "*los Indios*."

I was trembling with cold and pain, and the señora brought a jar full of glowing charcoal to warm me, while she prepared a glass of steaming herb juice for my stomach. The first taste of the green liquor threatened to recall the sickness, and I set it aside. Bob drank it before the woman returned from the kitchen, to avoid offending her. She smiled at the empty glass and assured me I would be well by morning.

A tall, awkward youth, his hat twisted in his hands and an embarrassed grin on his face, stood in the patio, staring into our room.

We were sitting stooped over a jar of coals. It was damp and cold outside. Bob invited the boy in, to share the fire.

"What is your name, *joven?*"

"Martin, señor." He drew up a chair and sat at a respectful distance from us.

"Do you live in this house, Martin?"

"No, señor. I am the dairyman. I brought the milk for your supper." Without a pause, and almost breathlessly, he asked, "you are Americanos, no?"

"Yes, we are from the United States."

"I have read of it," he said. Then, in tones almost reverent, "someday I will go there." He launched into a stream of questions about the "wonderful country of the north." His timidity faded and he thrust his head forward, elbows on knees, snatching greedily at every smallest crumb of information falling from our lips.

He paused in his questioning, and again he appeared embarrassed. Slowly he began speaking in an unaccustomed language, "I weesh to spik but I can not spik."

"You speak very well, Martin," said Bob. "Where did you learn English?"

"Say that more slowly," he begged. And, as Bob repeated his words, Martin's lips moved to imitate him. Slowly, the boy echoed, "jou spik verre well, Marrtin. W're deed jou le-arrn Engl's?"

"What does that mean in Spanish?" he asked. Bob explained.

"I have le-arrn thees—*¿como se dicen 'palabras'?*—worrds of a book of the padre." He tried to go on, but he lacked words. "I weesh to spik but I can not spik." He spread his hands in a gesture of helplessness.

"You do not speak badly at all. English is a difficult

language but if you were in the United States, I think you could learn it very rapidly."

Again he asked Bob to repeat, and again he spoke the words after him, asking, when he had finished, what they meant. From a pocket he took a stubby pencil and a piece of greasy, brown paper. "Will you write what you have said?"

Far into the night, we sat about the glowing charcoal, writing and speaking English words for Martin. Finally we were forced to ask him to leave in order that we might rest.

He paused at the door, his hat twisted in his hands. "Señores, if you will come to my little house tomorrow, I will give you fresh milk to take with you. Also, I will bring some for your breakfast. It will cost you nothing, señores."

We thanked him, his lips forming after us, the words we were speaking. "Good night," he repeated awkwardly in English, and backed out into the dark patio.

Morning crept painfully out of a night of misery. I could neither eat breakfast nor drink of the milk brought by Martin, but I told Bob I was much improved, and refused to stop for the day. He threw the heavy saddle on my horse and attended to the packs and the canteens. He knew I was lying about my condition.

We traversed a deserted, mud-spattered world. We twisted and turned, weaving upward or downward with the warp of mountain trails. But the animal I rode, was the great black mare that dashes madly along the paths of darkness.

The noises of a fiesta lifted me back to the light of day, and to my faithful Pistole. We were riding along a well-worn road, between fields of green corn. Before us was the plaza of a ranch village, crowded with Indians and mestizos in holiday attire.

Guitars and violins were playing. Voices were laughing and singing. Girls in bright sarapes, and men in white "pyjamas" were dancing on the smooth stones. Fruit stands were set on the ground, under squares of white canvas. The vender of sweets cried his wares, and the barker before the lone puppet show added to the happy clamor.

We turned our horses into a municipal corral already occupied by half a hundred burros. A temporary *fontanita*, in an adobe building facing the square, seemed to be doing a rushing business, and we entered. I sipped at a bowl of hot beef broth, and Bob ate hungrily of a dozen, savory, native dishes.

I felt slightly stronger and we walked about the village, followed by the curious stares of its people. The church attracted us, and, nearby, we discovered the casa grande, its back turned to the plaza.

A man came out to meet us, a tall man with waving black hair and a middle-aged waist line. He wore the tight, leather breeches and jacket of the charro. He acknowledged our introduction, with a bow, and welcomed us to his ranch.

His name, he said, was Chapman, Hernandez Chapman. His father was an Englishman, but he had been dead many years and the son regretted that he spoke not one word of his father's language.

He showed us through the church with its rich furnishings, and relics brought from Spain. We went with him to his home for a glass of cognac. He sent for our horses and had them fed. He invited us to dinner, and we sat at the table with him, his wife and two small children. But we did not eat, and the sight of food, following the glass of liquor, sickened me again.

After dinner, Señor Chapman walked with us to the stable. Our horses were saddled and we prepared to leave. The next ranch, he told us, was three and one-half leagues across the hills. It was called Santo Domingo. He sent an old Indian to run along before the horses, and direct us to the boundaries of the Chapman domain.

*A Circle of Light . . .
Took the Form of a Folding Fan . . .*

CHAPTER XXV

A CIRCLE of light, flung from the open top of the lamp shade, took the form of a folding fan, where it struck the vaulted arches of the ceiling above my head. It was almost dark about the bed in the corner, and only a few timid rays caressed the silver hair of the kind old señora who sat silently at my feet. The steaming potion of juices boiled from *cedro* leaves, which she had brought me a few minutes earlier, had soothed my outraged stomach, and its warmth remained in my veins. The blackness that had enveloped me all day, receded and drew with it some of the weakness that had bound me to the bed.

Staring at the folding fan of light on the ceiling, I asked, "what day is this?"

"It is Sunday, child. Do you feel stronger?"

"Yes, gracias. Where is Bob?"

"He will be here soon. He has gone to see the bulls."

"The bulls?"

"Yes, child. The fighting bulls which are to be sent to the rings at Monterrey and the capital."

"But of course, señora. I had forgotten. Forgive me."

We had stopped Saturday night at the Hacienda Santo Domingo, in the southernmost corner of the State of San Luis Potosí. We were in a land of great distances.

and few inhabitants. Ranches were far apart, and only mountain trails led from one to another.

At Santo Domingo, across which a man can not walk in a single day, bulls are bred and tested for the swords of the matadors. From the mountain valleys of Santo Domingo have gone fighting animals, of Spanish and Madero blood, the fame of which lives in stories and songs throughout Mexico.

For two days my stomach had refused food. I was unable to eat, the night we arrived at Santo Domingo. And Sunday morning I became violently ill at the sight of my breakfast. I ran across the patio to my room, and stumbled the last few steps to the bed. The blessed fingers of unconsciousness pressed away the pain.

Thus passed the Sabbath, in darkness, until the warm juice of the herbs and the soft light from the floor lamp had brought with them a portion of my lost vitality.

Two men were standing before an half-completed adobe building when we came in sight of the Hacienda Santo Domingo. One of them held a measuring stick; the other was pointing with a carpenter's pencil.

Behind them was the low, red, many-columned *casa grande*, set in a garden of fruit trees and flowers. Near it stood the pink domed church. There were other buildings along three sides of a square, and on their walls were paintings of great black bulls charging the brilliant capes in the hands of *los toreros*.

One of the men was an intelligent appearing Indian, wearing heavy denim trousers, a striped shirt and a felt hat. The other was older, very slim, and had blue eyes

and blond hair. He was dressed in khaki and the tails of his shirt were tied in a knot over his belt. He, we learned, was one of the two owners of the ranch.

It was he who looked up from his work, returned our greeting and invited us to get down and rest.

Servants were called to blanket our horses, see that they were watered, fed, groomed and placed in a comfortable stall. The packs and saddles were carried to a room which was to be prepared for us. We sat down under the arched portico of the casa grande, to converse with the *haciendado*.

"The house you are building, there, señor, for what purpose is it designed?"

"It is to be a school for the children of the Indians. Every ranch must educate the youth of its laboring families. The government has decreed it."

"And the bull fight scenes on the walls of the other houses, señor, what do they signify?"

"We breed, here, *los toros* for the rings. My brother—he also is my partner—is a sports enthusiast. My son, Miguel, too. He rides with his uncle. He is an amateur with the cape and sword. He helps test the young bulls for their vigor and bravery."

Even as he spoke, two horsemen thundered into the yard before us and slid to a halt. The Indians gathered about them, eager to hold their horses, to remove the ornate saddles to the harness room, and to lead the sweating animals away to blankets and a dry stall. The horsemen walked toward us: A strong, powerfully built man, wearing a giant sombrero, leather trousers and

spurs that flashed silver; and a youth, similarly dressed, but much slighter of build.

The youth walked with the grace of a stalking animal, but his face was like that of a pretty child.

"Señores, may I present my brother, and my son, Miguel?" We shook hands.

Miguel wore a pistol low on his thigh, a knife at the back of his belt; and a mozo ran, bringing a leather-encased sword that had been buckled to his saddle. The older man also carried a pistol, and under his arm he held a long, slender lance, the point of which was wrapped with thick cord, except for a single inch at the tip.

"Why do you go so heavily armed, gentlemen? Is it dangerous here?"

They laughed. "There are many mountain lions in the hills, and renegade Indians," said the older man. "Even good Indians respect the glint of steel."

Miguel followed my gaze to the lance. "But this, my friend, is the weapon of the bull fighter. With it we test the ferocity of the young bulls. It is the same as that used by the *picador*, except the point is bound. That is to prevent wounding the animal too painfully. It is just sharp enough to make him fighting mad."

"Come with me to the office," he added, "and I will explain the test for *los toros*."

The walls of the ranch office were covered with photographs of matadors, of bull-fight scenes and of many bulls. There also were many brightly colored posters, all of different dates and different designs, but all hav-

ing one line in common: "Five Savage Bulls From Santo Domingo."

Miguel took a slender, black book from an iron safe, and opened it on the desk before us. "This," he said, "is the stud record of our fighting animals. In it are listed the names and pedigrees of the bulls that already have died in the ring, and of those which we are raising for the fights. Every bull of a savage line, at Santo Domingo, is listed here.

He pointed to the left-hand column on the ruled page. "Here are the names, 'Filipe, Jago, Pedro, Villa, Diablo, Calixto, Ignacio . . .' This one was killed at San Luis. This one gored a matador at the capital. Filipe was sent to Ciudad Victoria, Pedro to Monterrey.

"In this second column, you can see, is recorded the color of each animal. Next come the records of the parents. We do not only ascertain the spirit and temper of the bulls but, also, of the cows which bear them." He laughed, "we do not check how much milk and butter they yield, but how many times and with what ferocity they charge a horseman.

"And here, this is what I came to show you." Miguel indicated the next to last column on the page. "This lists the results of testing the young bulls. See, here it says, '*ocho, muy feroces*', (eight, very ferocious) and here, '*diez, con mucho espíritu*', (ten with much spirit). The numbers eight and ten indicate how many times the bull, at the age of two years, charged a horseman who met every charge with a thrust of the spear." He indicated the lance with the bound point. "That is my job."

The final entry on the page of the stud book described the conduct of the bull in the ring, and the bravery with which he met death. Miguel pointed proudly to the portions of that column, which had been filled. "The bulls of Santo Domingo always fight with great valor."

Darkness had come, and we went into the dining room, for the evening meal. We sat down at a long table filled with food, but I must excuse myself.

Miguel showed me my room and I fell weakly into bed.

"You have slept all day," said Miguel's mother, the white-haired señora. "Are you not hungry?"

I felt of my face, and it was cold. I tried to raise myself in the bed. The fan of light danced drunkenly on the ceiling above me.

"I need food but I am afraid I can not eat."

The señora hurried away, and returned with a small glass of wine. "This is very old, and good. Drink it while I prepare you some broth."

I sipped the wine and it gave me strength to sit up. I was eating the broth when Bob and Miguel came in from inspecting the bulls.

"How you feel, colonel?"

"Like hell, chief. Say, I'm sorry about this. We should be in San Luis de la Paz today."

"Forget it. We could not get our mail before tomorrow, anyway."

"You should see the bulls they raise around this

place," he exclaimed, "and the way this boy, Miguel, flings a red cape in their faces."

"Well, we'll leave tomorrow morning," I persisted, and I went to sleep.

Miguel was looking down at me, smiling. He held a guitar under one elbow. "You mind if we play and sing?"

"No, I would enjoy it." I sat up and looked around. The señora was sitting at the foot of my bed. Miguel's two brothers sat on Bob's bed. Bob and the boys' uncle were on a couch under the floor lamp. Through the darkened doorway I caught a glimpse of black eyes and smiling lips,—a daughter of the household, who might not enter a man's bed chamber.

Miguel and his elder brother, Enrique, played on guitars, and the younger boy joined them in singing.

Their songs were ballads of the ranch country, native airs springing from the vast silent hills and the valleys between the hills. Strength and constancy mingled, in minor strains, with stories of love and war, and "great black bulls that fought with the fury of ten thousand devils."

The muffled throb of the guitars crept into my blood. The tales of heroism, borne by the songs, inspired courage in my mind and body. Perhaps it was only the broth I had eaten, but I felt stronger, and soon I was sitting on the side of the bed, drawing on my boots.

The music changed to lays of laughter, of student days, moonlight, dancing feet and flirtatious eyes. I

patted my foot to the rhythm. They began playing familiar tunes. There was a broad grin on Miguel's face. From "Diez Muchachas" and "Ojos Verdes," he thrummed softly into "Carry Me Back to Old Virginia!" And he sang it in English filled with the romanticism of Spanish "r's".

I forgot my illness. On the second chorus, I sang the lead and Miguel slurred upward into a tenor, as easily as if we had rehearsed it. My ears seemed filled with the pulsations of gentle, subtle sounds. I forgot my sick bed and the hardships of the road. I forgot the others were with me, and, as I sang, life seemed strangely good. The sound of my voice seemed to draw the strength back into my limbs.

We sang again and again, ending with the once-popular "When Day Is Done."

Laughter circled the room, masculine laughter, deep and sincere. They all were looking at me; the old señora was smiling. I knew I was blushing and there was nothing I could do about it. At last, Miguel came to my rescue. "The music, it seems, has worked a miraculous cure, my friend." Again they laughed, and I with them.

*Great Effort Was Required to Withdraw
My Hungry Gaze from the Two Señoritas . . .*

CHAPTER XXVI

GREAT effort was required to withdraw my hungry gaze from the two señoritas who prepared our evening meal at the *casa de huéspedes* (house of travelers) in San Luis de la Paz; and only the day before I had been too weak to travel. Bob also was neglecting his food, to feast his eyes.

The young women were sisters and sufficiently similar in appearance to pass for twins. They were dressed for a party; and our coming in the night to ask a meal and lodging had delayed them. They moved about the patio and in and out of the adjoining rooms, scooping food from earthen vessels in the fireplace, bringing water for our hands and faces, preparing our beds. These tasks were performed in a breathless hurry, and with a deftness that belied soft hands and carefully manicured nails.

Dresses of silken stuffs, mesh hose and slender heels, too, were out of their natural element in the kitchen, but the surroundings detracted nothing from the ladies' charm. They might have been moving regally through a crowded ballroom or drifting with the perfume of the flowers in a moonlit garden.

Bearded and bedraggled, and smelling strongly of the odor of horses, Bob and I sat gazing at the beautiful

señoritas of the *cocina*, surrounded by pots and pans and savory foods.

I did not know their names, nor their ages, nor who their parents were. I did not know whether or not they were educated, nor what was their exact status in society. But I did know their hair was blacker than moonless nights in the desert, and smooth as the still waters where stars admire their unwinking reflections. I knew their lips were the tender, trembling lips of southern women; their eyes, deep brown pools, were fringed with lashes that shaded them with a subtle loveliness. And their bodies were slender enough to have grace without sacrifice of charms that are solely feminine.

I knew I felt a twinge of jealousy when two young army officers called and took them away to the dance, leaving us alone in the flower-filled patio, to finish our meal and go to bed.

We arose early Monday morning at Santo Domingo, to ride to San Luis de la Paz. I still was weak from my long fast, but the illness seemed to have passed and a light breakfast fortified me for a day on the road.

We attended mass, while the horses were being cared for. Several hundred Indians, on their knees, overflowed the little church, its stone porch and the steps leading down into the ranch yard. Bob and I accompanied Miguel and Enrique, and entered the temple by a side door near the altar.

A wrinkled old priest, in the self-conscious clothing of a layman, read the service, shook hands with members of the rancher's family, and rushed away toward

the next ranch, in a battered automobile driven by an Indian boy.

Miguel had his own horse brought out. He would ride with us to the boundary of his father's property, he said. We started out of the patio, but the señora called us back, to ask about my health and to give me a bottle of boiled milk for lunch.

From the fields of green corn, we climbed into mountains so steep our mounts must stop occasionally, to rest and recapture their breath. We passed small herds of horses, and great black bulls staring defiantly. "This one will go to the ring next season," said Miguel, or: "That horse has Moorish blood. He was hidden in the hills when the bandits came."

The angry flutter of an over-taxed automobile motor sounded in the thick silence of the mountains. We came upon the car of the priest, climbing the rocky trail where only animals were wont to go. We helped him over a place the machine could not pull, and scrambled ahead of him, onto a high plateau dotted with fields of grain.

Miguel left us, at a house before a huddle of long, stone granaries. We thanked him, before parting, and sent our repeated thanks to his family. We shook hands, and rode south from Santo Domingo, between stone walls beyond which extended the rustling *milpas* of corn.

All day we traveled through a countryside of fertile fields and sleek, fat cattle. At long intervals the trail led into a grove of cypress trees under which nestled an hacienda with its adjoining church and store, or a

pulque factory and the long, gray granaries built of heavy stones, and shaped like hangars for giant dirigibles.

A charro, on a pacing horse, joined us at a ranch-house, and continued along through the milpas, inspecting his crops. He wore a felt sombrero, heavy with silver, leather trousers and a yellow shirt of rope silk, on the back of which were embroidered the Mexican symbols, an eagle perched on a cactus, holding a serpent in its talons.

A barefoot Indian, with a cloth band around his black hair, lay on a grass bank beside the road. His livestock—two goats, a burro, an ox, a cow and a spindle-legged lamb,—grazed around him.

In a clearing, the earth was being broken for planting. Ancient, wooden plows drawn by teams of bullocks, wove slowly back and forth. Brown men, bare-legged to the thighs, held the reins and followed along the damp furrows. Women with rebozos wound about their heads worked in the hedges of prickly pear, cutting off the fruit and the tender leaves, to be prepared as food.

At noon we stopped under a grove of tall trees with drooping, lacy foliage. The horses were turned loose to graze. Bob ate lunch, and I drank the bottle of milk prepared by the señora at Santo Domingo. We lay down in the grass and slept for an hour.

We saddled up, and sauntered along across the cool, shaded trail, breathing in clean, fresh air blown down from the mountains, speculating as to the past great-

ness of the ranches which could be seen in the distance, laughing at our hardships, giving thanks for our youth.

We met an Indian boy in the roadway near the Hacienda *La Inglesa*—The English Woman. He appeared to be about eighteen or nineteen years old. His hair was long and black. He wore only a pair of short, white breeches that tied about his waist and ended at his thighs. His shoulders were broad and strong, and muscles rippled up and down his arms, as he walked. His chest was broad and deep, his hips narrow, and his legs slender, but strung with sinewy ropes that glided smoothly beneath smooth, brown skin.

He looked like a picture I faintly remembered of an ancient Greek runner with a roll of papyrus in his hand and a band around his head, or a statue of The Discus Thrower, painted mahogany brown.

I whistled under my breath.

"Did you ever see such a body?" Bob asked.

"Not alive," I answered.

"*Buenas tardes, joven ¿Como le van?*" Bob greeted him.

"*Buenas tardes, señores.*" He stopped and stared at us. "*¿A dónde van?*"

"To San Luis de la Paz. How many kilometers is it from here?"

"*¿Quien sabe?*" he answered. "Who knows?"

"But, is it far? We had hoped to reach there by night."

"Yes, it is very far, señor, *muy lejos.*"

"Do you think we will be able to reach it in three or four hours?"

"I do not know, señor. I have never been there. It is very far away." There was a blank look in the youth's eyes. It would have seemed that we had been asking him the distance to Tientsin or Timbuctoo. Yet we had been told that San Luis was but little more than forty kilometers from Santo Domingo, and we had ridden southward since early morning.

While Bob and the boy were talking, I had been gazing along the road before us. It stretched out, plainly visible, for several miles. All the way to the horizon seemed to be down hill, over bare, clean fields and low knolls. In the distance, the rays of the setting sun were playing on the white walls of a city set in a series of red-earth valleys.

I turned to Bob. "If I'm not mistaken, chief, there's our town about ten miles straight ahead."

He shaded his eyes and gazed in the direction I indicated. Then he looked at me, and chuckled. He turned back to the boy. "A thousand thanks, young man."

The youth bowed gravely. "For nothing, señores," and he trotted away, along the road toward the ranch.

I watched the remarkable play of his muscles, and the speed with which he drew away from us, at an easy, graceful trot. I looked at Bob and laughed. He laughed, too. "They are that way in every country," he said, "beautiful but dumb."

It was two hours after dark, when we passed through the soldier-filled streets of San Luis de la Paz, and stopped at the *casa de huéspedes*. The charming señoritas prepared food and our beds, and hurried away to a dance with the two young soldiers.

Sleep eluded me. It must have been long after midnight, and I had despaired even of counting sheep, when a woman's laughter sounded at the outside door. There was no window in our room, and we had left our own door wide open. I sat up in bed and looked out across the patio.

The moon was shining with a still brightness that made every flower in the terra cotta urns appear etched in silver. And into the silent purity of that square of moonlight stumbled the two young women whose mere presence near the dinner table had made me forget my hunger for food. With them were their officer friends, in handsomely tailored uniforms. All four were gloriously drunk.

One of the women's hair had fallen about her shoulders. She was weeping audibly. Her escort held her head, while she leaned over one of the flower urns. The man cursed her; and obscenity poured from her lips, in retaliation, after she had wiped them with the back of her hand. He gathered her up in his arms, and staggered away into the darkness.

The other couple laughed, as they disappeared. The woman took the officer's cap and placed it on her own head. She slipped her arms about his neck and pulled his head down to her. He pushed her back roughly and she fell on her knees before him, her arms clasped around his body.

They remained there, a moment, in the moonlight. The girl began to sob. The man lifted her to her feet, and they went into the room next to ours.

I looked toward the dark corner where Bob was

snoring softly. "Yeah, you're right, *amigo*. They're that way in every country." The words formed themselves on my lips half aloud.

I closed my eyes and went to sleep.

*Complete Fatigue Rode with Me
To the Rancho Arroyo Zarco.*

CHAPTER XXVII

COMPLETE fatigue rode with me to the Rancho Arroyo Zarco. Under the folds of the red capa, the column of my spine was the only portion of my being that stood of its own volition.

And relentless rains came again in the afternoon. They lashed cold and cruel in our faces. Only the stimulus of that exterior torture, however, prevented me from surrendering to the weakness within, dropping the cords of my muscles from the grip of my mind, and falling into blessed oblivion in the mud of the roadside.

Since the noon rest, we had ridden along the camino real which, in colonial days, was the main artery between San Luis Potosí, Querétaro and the capital. But the road had been abandoned, now, many years.

Once upon a time it was carefully paved with well-fitted stones, and fine carriages were driven over it. At the time of our passing, however, it was an almost impassable jumble of hills and washes and loose boulders that threatened to break a horse's ankle at every step. After the rain came, footing was made more uncertain, and the rocky trail was broken by slippery banks of red earth and streams of swift water.

Past deserted villages of mud and tile, past the soggy

hovels of the Indians, across flooded plains and along the narrow, deep-worn trails of the burros, we plodded; while illness twisted my strength out. The forces of unconsciousness were pressing hard toward victory, when the trees and flowers of Arroyo Zarco leaped into sight, bringing moral reënforcements.

I thoroughly enjoyed my breakfast at San Luis de la Paz, and the conversation of a young lawyer who sat at the table with us. A soft-spoken, white-haired, old woman brought us food. I wondered if she was the mother of the two indiscreet señoritas of the night before.

At noon, after riding all morning through a country of pastoral prosperity, we arrived at a village of apparently great antiquity. There were several abandoned buildings which indicated a past glory; but their broken arches were lifting jagged ends toward heaven, like gnarled fingers extended in prayer, and ugly mud huts crouched under the protecting wings of their crumbling walls.

Soldiers, in varying degrees of uniform dress, lounged about one dignified old doorway, and drying under-clothes were hung on the elaborate grillwork of an adjoining window.

Another venerable pile had been transformed into a cafe. We tied our horses to a tree in the plaza, and entered the building to procure food. A young charro and one of his vaqueros were seated at the single table. They invited us to sit with them.

The end of the room, opposite the table, was piled high with faggots. The floor was of hard-packed earth.

Behind a counter all a-clutter with open pans of food, an old woman and a girl stood before a brazier of glowing charcoal, cooking savory messes which were served us in courses.

I partook hungrily of everything that was placed before me. The soup, a thick beef broth, seemed delicious. The Spanish rice, I scooped into my mouth with folded pieces of tortilla. I ate of the eggs, cooked with tomatoes and peppers, and the chicken, boiled white.

A new dish was served us. At least, it was one we never had encountered before. It consisted of a large, green pod floating in the thick foam of a beaten egg white.

I cut into the pod and it was filled with a yellow, paste-thin cheese. I placed a small bite in my mouth. It seemed wreathed in flames. I grabbed for the water jar, and drank glass after glass of the cool liquid.

Tears streamed from my eyes. The charro was laughing quietly behind his hand. The vaquero was bolting large mouthfuls of food taken from the same pot, and appeared to be enjoying it. Bob had his head down, and there were tears at the corner of his eyes, too. I turned to the old woman behind the counter and asked what manner of conflagration this be, which she had given us.

"It is *chili con queso*," she said. "Chili stuffed with cheese and cooked in the white of an egg."

"It is much too hot for me, señora. I have the tongue of a cat," I explained.

"We shall fix the heat," she said. And she walked from behind the counter with a ladle of white navy beans which she dumped over the food in my plate.

The beans seemed to extinguish a part of the fire. I managed, with two bottles of strawberry soda water for chaser, to eat everything before me.

For dessert there was a dish of frijoles cooked into a thick, brick-colored paste.

We bought a half dozen bananas at a tienda, and rode out of the village to a grassy spot beside the road, where we might rest and the horses might graze for an hour. I was lying on my back, nibbling a banana, when the illness returned. I climbed to my feet, hurled the fruit at a stone, and walked away to the friendly shelter of a thicket.

The master and mistress of the Rancho Arroyo Zarco lived in a suite of rooms on the second floor of the hacienda. The first floor was taken up by a tienda, quarters for the storekeeper and his family, and several chambers which might have been used to store grain or other produce.

The master was tall, and slender, his skin as white as the tiled floor of the patio. His hair was black with a trace of a wave. His hands were long and tapering, like those of a musician. He spoke quietly, but his words issued forth from his lips with a confidence that hinted at hidden steel.

When we arrived at the hacienda, he was dressed in olive drab, newly pressed. His tie was a slender, black band; his boots were well polished. He spoke of New York, of Paris, London and Buenos Aires. He made no pretense of being a traveler, but his knowledge was convincing. His culture fitted him, with the neatness

of his olive drab uniform. He had returned recently from Argentina, he said. Business called him home. His brother needed his help in managing the ranch.

His wife was, physically and intellectually, charming. She was young and beautiful, with the beauty of those fair-skinned, raven-haired women who create little flutters of excitement at capitol balls in countries controlled by nordic men.

At dinner she asked if I would like an "es-spoon." The English words coming suddenly and unexpectedly from her lips, jerked the blocks from beneath the flying machine of my memories. I found myself thinking of my mother, and the way her hair, black too, draws away from her temples and ripples back in soft, billowy caresses to the knot nestled low on her neck. I thought of moonlight nights in Alabama—foreign things to Arroyo Zarco—negro songs; Luvenia, our cook, singing while she prepared my breakfast on Sunday morning.

But that soft Spanish voice drew me back to the landing. "Señor, you are surprise that I es-speak the Englis? Long time ago I have the good friend from the *universidad*, Princeton. He es-speak beautiful Spanish and beautiful Englis'." She looked at her husband, and I imagined there was longing in her eyes, but the shadow hung there hardly a moment before a smile drove it away. "He teach me these few words in Englis'. I have not forgot."

For a while the sound of her voice, making music of harsh, Anglo-Saxon sounds, caused me to forget my illness.

The hacienda at Arroyo Zarco was a hotel during colonial days. The stage coaches traveling over the *camino real*, between San Luis Potosí and Querétaro, stopped there for the night. Dons, in satin breeches and starched cuffs, and their ladies, in billowing skirts and lace mantillas, received lodging under its roof. Emisaries paused there on business for the king. Heavily armed caravans rested there, and their cargoes of silver, from the mines of Zacatecas and Pozo, in San Luis Potosí, were locked in the hotel strong-room over night.

Slender carriages and horses caparisoned with precious metals brought patrons to the doors of Arroyo Zarco. Huge, lumbering carts and sad-eyed oxen brought the best produce of the valleys and mountains to its kitchen.

But revolutions and rules have come and gone since colonial days. The ancient highway is impassable. The railroad lies far to the west. Arroyo Zarco, now, is an isolated ranch in the mountains of Guanajuato. Only its flowering gardens, a crumbling gateway, the tiled patio and the rooms occupied by its present master and mistress attest to the one-time grandeur of the place.

Our horses, when we arrived at Arroyo Zarco, were given into the care of an orderly from the company of soldiers which had been billeted at the ranch by order of the government. We were ushered into the living quarters of the hacienda, and introduced to the owners.

Almost in rags, our beards unkempt and uncut, our boots covered with mud, we walked into a drawing room that was a symphony of southern culture, sounding across the canyons of a hundred years. We sat on the edge of an intimate little sofa, upholstered in gray,

and dared not lean far back for fear of soiling the crisp lace doily pinned there. Large, clear mirrors, framed in heavy gilt, reflected our disreputable appearances and the contrasting refinement of our host and hostess.

Across a tile porch which framed the four sides of the patio, we walked to the dining room. We sat down at a long, narrow table covered with fresh linen. Candles burned silently in a circular, wrought-iron chandelier that hung from the central dome. The walls of the room were of carved wood, as high as a man's shoulders, and, above that, of oil paintings that extended from wainscoting to ceiling, from corner to corner, on four sides. So dark were the colors, and so aged the canvases, that but few of their faded subjects were visible in the candle light.

At one end of the room was a massive steel chest, and the under side of its open lid was covered with the intricate machinery of a lock such as the colonial Spaniards used to protect their valuables.

Food was brought on plates of silver and china, but I was unable to eat. I explained to the señora, that I had eaten something at noon that upset me. She seemed greatly concerned.

"It was the *chili con queso*, I think, señora. It is food I had not met before."

"Yes, it is very difficult to digest," she said. "I will prepare you a medicine." She called a servant to bring a bottle of fruit salts and a glass of warm water. I drank the foaming mixture with a feeling of great misgiving.

"*Con permiso*—pardon me," I mumbled and ran dizzily from the dining room.

*Of the Place and Method of My Cure
I Have Only Partial Recollection.*

CHAPTER XXVIII

OF THE place and method of my ultimate cure I have only partial recollection. Yet it was but the second day after leaving Arroyo Zarco, that I lay in the shade of an *abuehuete* tree, kicking at a large green fly buzzing about the toe of my boot, and planning meals I was going to order when I got back to the United States.

My stomach had embarrassed me further before the charming señora of Arroyo Zarco, by revolting at the first sip of fresh milk taken for breakfast. I really was too weak and too ill to travel that day, but I no longer had the countenance to face our hostess, and her very concern for my welfare drove me back to the *camino real*.

I thanked her repeatedly for her kindnesses, and attempted to conquer the limberness of my knees.

She doubted that I was strong enough to travel. She insisted that we stay as long as we wished. The house was ours. She would see that I received the best of care until I was able to ride again.

I drew myself erect, with an effort, and assayed a bow. "Señora, I am greatly indebted to you. Thank you a thousand times. But I am quite strong. I no longer can impose upon your generous nature." I lied and the

señora protested, but Bob and I departed, after shaking hands with our host and receiving his good wishes.

Bob gave me a lift in mounting. I accepted it, and then cursed him, asking if he thought I was an infant that I had to be helped on a horse.

That day was like a dream of endless torture. It started in a whirlpool of green meadows flooded with clear water in which iron-shod hoofs splashed, splashed, splashed. It evolved into red mud banks which slipped treacherously underfoot. It led into traps of high stone walls, which must be broken, that we might toil again over the boulder-strewn canyons of the "royal road."

I felt, rather than saw, the mountains close in about us; and the sun ceased to glitter on the wet grass. It was dark and cold, and the clap, clap of the horses' hoofs jarred into the region of my solar plexus.

A strong light struck me in the face and knocked my perspective back to focus. We were issuing from a pass in the sierra, and the sun was full in our eyes. We had left the exalted valley of Arroyo Zarco, surrounded by its wall of peaks. Before us, the trail turned again southward, dipping down until it was lost in the blue haze of distance.

We began the descent, braced against the pull of gravity, slipping—slipping, for me, into unconsciousness.

I heard Bob's voice. It sounded faint and far away. And a thousand birds seemed to be chirp-chirping in each of my ears. I looked about me. Circles of glittering gold, punctuated by moving brown spots, beat in waves

into my eyes. Finally, the waves ceased, grew stationary, and changed into mounds of bright yellow sand. The brown spots also took form, the form of little brown animals darting in and out of the sand mounds.

Prairie dogs! A city of them. On every side their burrows spread, until the outer ones were mere specks in the distance. From every burrow an angry voice was barking disapproval of our intrusion.

My ears roared with the din. I looked back. The mountains were miles away. The sun was directly overhead, its rays striking fire from the tips of my spurs. I turned to Bob. He was looking at me, his eyes greatly perturbed. "How do you feel?" he asked gruffly.

"I'm all right. How are you?" He continued staring at me. My bluster melted. I rubbed my eyes. "I must have gone to sleep," I muttered weakly.

We rode on through the city of angry prairie dogs. I returned to "sleep."

Another light was shining in my face. It was held by a man with a curling, black mustache. All around us were the darkened forms of houses, slightly darker than the night. We walked through tall double doors on which deep and elaborate carvings leaped and receded with the passing of the lantern. We followed the light up a flight of stairs and into a high-ceilinged chamber as large as a ballroom. Pitifully alone in one corner were two beds and a table. I walked to one of the beds and lay down across it. The mustached man lighted a candle on the table. Bob drew my boots off. I was too weak to protest. He slipped the covers over me.

The doctor shook me gently. I knew he was a doctor by the way he sat on the edge of his chair and looked at me over his glasses. From the flare of candlelight beyond his massive head and mane of black hair, the faces of Bob and the man with the mustache peered down at me. The doctor felt my pulse, looked at my tongue, listened to the sounds in my chest and placed a thermometer in my mouth.

"*¿Dónde están los dolores?*" he asked. I placed a hand above my stomach. He began asking Bob questions regarding my actions, and I went to sleep. He awakened me to force a bitter cup between my lips. He gave me a glassful of hot, unsweetened limeade, to drink, and he placed a steaming jar of the liquid on the table near my head. "Drink of this every time you awaken," he said. He and Bob walked away, whispering.

Morning found me peering into a broken mirror at the ghost of a human being. The skin above a shaggy brown beard was yellow, spotted with tiny red eruptions. The eyes were sunk in twin wells of black.

Bob walked up behind me. I tried to smile. He led me to a pan of water, and handed me a comb. "You sure are a hell of a looking object," he said.

"You couldn't take any beauty contests, yourself."

We sat at one of the many, small, round tables in a large dining room, and the sunshine streamed in through wide opened windows. Bob ordered breakfast. I asked for the same, but the mestiza who waited on our table smiled and shook her head. She brought oat meal, eggs, coffee, sweet rolls, tortillas and a bowl of brown beans. The sight of food recalled the fact that I had not eaten

in two days. I reached for a roll and Bob slapped my hand.

"What the devil?"

"Sorry, colonel. It's the doctor's order. The moza is bringing your breakfast." A glass of steaming *atole*—corn meal soaked in hot water—was placed before me. I ate the tasteless mush and stalked from the room.

The horses were waiting under the portico of the hotel, already saddled. The plaza was alive with people. Squares of canvas atop single center poles, like giant odd-shaped umbrellas, shaded the produce offered for sale, by numerous brown women who sat on their heels, on the bare stone. Burros drank from the circular trough at the base of a fountain. Shops were waking up, opening shuttered windows. Merchants stood in the doorways, wearing their professional smiles. I mounted my horse and sat there, speaking to those who passed.

Bob appeared, a bottle in his hand and a smile on his face. The bottle was of the size and shape of those usually containing beer. He extended it to me. "This," he said, "is a final token from the medico." I glanced at the label, condemned all "medicos" to the infernal regions, and stuck the bottle under my belt. "In case that is not sufficient," Bob continued, "you may have the prescription." He handed me a folded piece of paper. "And you might try mixing it up, yourself."

We said farewell to the man with the mustache, gave him two pesos—about sixty cents—to pay the doctor's fee, and rode away. Near the edge of town Bob went into a store and returned with two blocks of black

chocolate. He gave me one of them. "That is your lunch," he said.

The medicine in the beer bottle, its label revealed, was to be taken every time I suffered a recurrence of the pains in my stomach. It tasted like soured lime juice mixed with "dead" Bromo-Seltzer. But it cured me, finally and completely. When the jogging of the horse incited anger in the troubled parts, I took a draft from the bottle and it acted as oil on stormy waters. When we passed near an hacienda where a pulque factory was polluting the air, and nausea threatened, a swallow of the medicine drove sickness again into hiding.

All morning we rode through a land of extensive ranches. All of them gave evidence of once having been blessed with beauty and prosperity. But the irrigation ditches that had furnished their life blood were clogged with rubbish, the spreading milpas were overgrown with weeds and the buildings were falling in ruins. Their activities were restricted to work in a few scraggly fields of corn, and fermentation of the juice of the maguey.

At noon we passed an hacienda, the walls of which extended approximately a quarter of a mile along the trail over which we were traveling. But its windows were shuttered and its doors barred. The only signs of life about the place were furnished by two Indians standing before the casa grande, throwing shovelsful of corn into the air, that the wind might drive the chaff away, and a third man who rode parallel to the wall and ran his horse through the single open doorway as we drew near him.

Hardly a kilometer farther on, there was a reservoir formed in a natural valley, across one end of which had been constructed a stone and cement dam, reënforced by flying buttresses of the same material.

Below the dam there was a road bordered with giant *abuebuete* trees; and the green grass formed a soft carpet between the beaten path and the corn milpas.

We staked the horses and lay down under the trees to nibble at the blocks of chocolate.

The chocolate finished, I rolled over on my back and took the final swallow of my medicine. The bottle spun end over end and shattered, with a consoling crash, against a pile of stones near the foot of the dam.

"Bob," I said, as I kicked thoughtfully at the large green fly buzzing about my boot toe, "when we get back to Alabama, I'll show you some meals that really are meals. For breakfast we will have half of a cold melon, a cereal with white sugar and cream, eggs—without tomatoes and chili,—toast and coffee." I heard a groan. "And for lunch, that will be the big meal, there will be a lemon pie as large as . . ."

"Say, will you shut up or will I have to choke you. I'm trying to sleep."

"All right, go ahead and sleep, you unappreciative tramp, but don't bother a gentleman when he has just set down to his victuals."

*Strong, Brown Feet Pounded
The Ancient Stones of Chichemecas.*

CHAPTER XXIX

STRONG, brown feet pounded the ancient stones of Chichemecas. Panther men, small of stature but powerfully muscled, trotted back and forth, back and forth, between threshing machine and granary, like figures on a mechanical toy. Under the dignified arches of the two-storied portico, the corn sheller grunted and strained, rocked by the *pam pam* of a gasoline motor. Men perched atop it and received up baskets of golden ears to fling into its gaping, gluttonous jaws. Chaff swirled in heavy white clouds and made masks on damp brown faces. Grain poured into open sacks. Cobs fell into a growing pile, and were shoveled into a fuel bin.

The panther men, white breeches rolled to the crotch and ragged shirts revealing broad, copper colored chests, hoisted two hundred-pound burdens of corn to their backs and trotted away to the granary.

Bob and I halted in our rambles about the ranch, to speak a moment with the young Don Carlos who, book and pencil in hand, was keeping tally on the storage of the maize.

"*Buenos días, señores. Did you sleep well?*"

"Yes, thank you. And you?"

"Very well, *gracias.*"

"We missed you at *desayuno* (early breakfast)" Bob remarked.

"Yes. I was here, getting the machine started."

He was a pleasant-mannered, slender, young Spaniard. The night before, he had explained to us the art of producing pulque. And the foreman of the vaqueros had whispered that he was a son of the former owner of the ranch. Since the government had taken over administration of the property as an agrarian project, the youth had returned from the university to take a job as combination vaquero and clerk.

The Rancho Chichemecas is in Guanajuato, only a few miles from the line between that state and Querétaro. Its properties, we were told, extended unmarked and unfenced many leagues across the sierra and the broad, rolling valleys. Every day its vaqueros drive in herds of cattle found hidden in mountain recesses, unbranded cattle that run and fight like jungle animals. Often they sight bands of wild horses, fleet savages of Arabian and Spanish blood.

Every harvest the Indian tillers of the soil bring in tall, two-wheeled, ox-drawn carts filled with grain, red beans, tomatoes, pepper, and minor produce, raised in the broad community fields or in the individual milpas worked by single families, scattered far and wide wherever there is a plot of fertile soil.

The late afternoon sun made a fairy castle of the hacienda at Chichemecas. It revealed itself to us five kilometers before we reached it, glistening white and

silver across a broad artificial lake set like a gigantic drop of mercury within a circular wall of living green.

"Bob, am I delirious again? I don't believe it is possible for anything on earth to be as beautiful as that." We stopped in silent adoration of the soft vision of silver, green and white, which seemed almost to sway in the slanting rays of gold that played upon it.

I was not delirious. The emotions I felt, were reflected in my companion's eyes. "God," he breathed, "if it were possible for a man to capture those colors on canvas I would spend the rest of my life without moving from this spot."

Indians rode by us on the backs of gray and brown burros. They sang as they rode. They smiled as they returned our greetings.

The trail led beneath the green-clad slopes of earth which retained the waters of the lake. A clear, swift stream from the overflow, hummed through a grove of slender cypress trees. Once we were forced to wade it, and the horses stopped a moment to drink and cool their noses. On top of the retaining wall a gray-haired old native was sunning himself. He arose to his elbow and waved to us, "*adiós, caballeros.*"

We returned his greeting, and entered the high, white walls of the ranch village.

A scene of peaceful industry was revealed. Women shuffled by at that peculiar half-walk, half-run of the Mexican burden bearer. On their heads they carried baskets or sacks filled with produce, mostly corn. At the granary across from the hacienda office, this corn was being measured out and checked by a clerk. A score

of the women stood in line awaiting their daily rations. At a long stone trough a muleteer was watering his "string" of burros. On the backs of the animals were tied baskets filled with white cheeses, pig skins swollen with pulque, and hempen sacks of charcoal. Tired laborers were coming in from the neighboring fields, to store agricultural tools in a long shed that housed a threshing machine, several steam and gasoline tractors, a wheat combine, plows, harrows and hand implements.

On every side of us were the smiling faces of Indian men, women and children. There were more than eleven hundred of them employed on the ranch, we were told.

We inquired the way to the office of the majordomo. A boy ran along before our horses to direct us. A hard-featured man with a wide, upturned, black mustache, stood within the arched passageway leading to the patio of the casa grande. He was the federal administrator, he said.

We dismounted, and Bob handed the jefe the letter written by the governor of San Luis Potosí. He shook hands with us and called a mozo to take the horses. We were invited into the office. It was a busy hour, our host said, and, with our permission, he would return to his desk.

Three youths, in the jackets, tight breeches and "chaps" of vaqueros, sauntered into the room. They unbuckled gun belts and hung them on pegs in the wall. Chin straps on their sombreros were loosened and the hats pushed back to rest upon their shoulders. They draped themselves across available chairs and drew out sacks of tobacco. Bob offered cigarettes, already rolled.

They accepted, and we introduced ourselves. They shook hands awkwardly.

Most of the Mexican cowboys we had seen before, were mestizos, dark, scowling half-castes, with more Indian than white blood. This trio at Chichemecas was different.

One of them had gray eyes and dark curly hair. Another, although dark of hair and eyes, had fair skin that daily life in sun and wind had failed to tan. The last, and tallest of the three, was blond, fair-skinned and blue-eyed.

At San Luis Potosí we had met a red-headed Mexican named O'Mally. He was born in Mexico and understood no language but Spanish. That was the first indication I had had that the United States was not the only portion of the western world that had been adopted as home by wanderers from northern Europe.

It was then I learned there were many good Mexicans whose grandparents were natives of County Cork.

The three vaqueros at Chichemecas, however, were not of Nordic ancestry. They were Spanish, their names: Gonzales, de Leon and, the very blond young man, something that sounded like Alvarez. This latter was the youth we came to know as the young Don Carlos.

We went with the cowboys for a tour of inspection of the corrals and stables. A wide arched doorway led from the patio of the casa grande into the stucco-walled stock enclosure half as large as a city block. In this enclosure were a herd of mules and cow ponies, and, standing aloof in one corner, heads lowered, eyes rolling, a dozen large, black bulls. "They are wild ones,"

Don Carlos indicated the bulls. "We have brought them in from the mountains. They would kill a man,—pouuf—like that." He snapped his fingers.

"But do not be afraid," he laughed. "As long as we keep the horses between us and them they will not notice us." We laughed, too. But I felt infinitely relieved after we had safely passed through another gateway.

We walked before a row of stalls constructed of stone and cement. Every stall but one, and there must have been twenty or more, held a fine young horse or a mare and a long-legged colt. "They are all that are left of the old herd," said Don Carlos.

The single stall that did not house the noble stock of Chichemecas held our attention longest. In it, shoulder to shoulder, eating green alfalfa, stood Negra and Pistole. They whinnied softly when we stopped before them.

It still was light, and we left the vaqueros, to stroll about through the little village huddled around the casa grande. We loafed a few minutes with the store-keeper, but the counter was too hard for comfort.

Passing an old señora and two young white girls, we tipped our hats. They bowed and walked rapidly away.

Then the shrill cry of a clarinet split the twilight and we followed the path of its echo.

A fat man in blue overalls sat on top of a desk in the center of the school room. He was alone, and playing popular American tunes on his slender horn. We stood in the doorway a moment, before he saw us. He

sprang to his feet. "Come in, gentlemen." He bowed almost to the floor.

"It is a pleasure to have you here. I heard you were stopping at the 'big house,'" he said. "Today my students were studying the United States." He indicated a map hanging across a blackboard. "You would do me a great favor, señores, if you would come tomorrow and tell them something of your country."

"It is most unfortunate, sir," Bob said, "but tomorrow we must arise early. We hope to reach San Juan del Río before nightfall. I am very sorry."

"That is a pity," said the schoolmaster. "I doubt if any of my pupils ever have seen an Americano."

"Would you like to see how pulque is made?" asked Don Carlos. "Come with me. It is time for the men to begin arriving."

We entered a long, low, stone building. Darkness was rolling across the valley, and the young *don* lighted a candle.

We were in a large room that extended the length of the building. At one end was a low platform built in an alcove. The uncovered rafters and beams under the ceiling were festooned with artificial flowers and bright strips of colored paper. The floor was bare and smooth. "This is the fiesta hall. The dances are given here. It is appropriate that it be connected with the *fábrica de pulque*," Don Carlos laughed.

We passed into an adjoining room, of the same size and shape as the first. The flickering light of the candle

revealed a pair of scales, a desk, a pile of empty casks and half a dozen oblong vats filled with pulque.

Don Carlos placed his candle on the desk and opened a leather-bound account book. A knock sounded at a side door. He turned a large iron key in the lock and kicked back the massive panel. Twelve or fifteen burros, each bearing two small barrels lashed to its sides, and as many brown men, stood silently in the shadows of the patio.

One of the men slipped the two casks from the back of a mule, and the animal walked away. The man heaved one of the kegs to his shoulder and trotted into the room, to place it on the scales. Don Carlos recorded its weight, and another one was brought to the scales. He took a glass from the desk, pulled a plug from the end of the cask, and a thin, opalescent liquid glittered in the candle light. He filled two glasses and extended them to Bob and me.

"This is the juice of the maguey before it has been fermented," he said. "It is called *aguamiel* (honey-water)."

I tasted of the contents of my glass. It was not mis-named, this honey-water. It is as sweet as sugar dissolved in water. It has the consistency of cocoanut milk.

"The aguamiel is placed in these cow-hide vats," Don Carlos continued, "to ferment. We add a yeast compound to our pulque, which gives it greater body than that made by the Indians." He filled our glasses from the vats, and we drank of the fermented liquor.

"Why, that is just like eating solid food," Bob said. The pulque certainly seemed filled with some active and

immediate nourishment. "What is the nature of this yeast compound?"

"It is a secret formula, señor. I do not know, myself. My father paid a great deal of money for it."

The muleteers were busy bringing in their casks, having them weighed and emptying their contents into the cowhide vats. Don Carlos entered figures in his book, and talked as he worked.

"Have you seen the manner in which the juice is drawn from the maguey?"

"No, señor," Bob answered. "We have seen the centers of the plants chopped out, and often the hollow that remained was filled with a liquid. But we do not understand how the liquid is taken from that hollow."

Don Carlos took a long, slender calabash from the belt of one of the Indians. He pointed to a small hole in the bulbous end of it. "This," he said, "is placed in the shallow pool of aguamiel in the heart of the plant. The air is sucked from the gourd, through the hole at the other end, and the juice rushes into the tube of the calabash. Then it is emptied into the casks strapped to the burros.

"It is slow work. A man must have powerful lungs and he must keep moving all day to fill his two barrels before dark."

When the last of the mules had been freed of his burden and the casks all had been weighed, a line of large, raw-boned mestizo cowboys gathered at the door. "Every night the vaqueros are given a liter of pulque," Don Carlos explained.

As the men filed by, each was given a tall can filled

with the liquor. The can was drained at one swallow. Some of the men attempted to pass through the line a second time, and they snickered like schoolboys when the jefe detected them and chased them away.

Cena, the final meal of the day among the upper classes in Mexico, usually is served about nine-thirty or ten o'clock. It was just nine-thirty when we entered the dining room on the second floor of the hacienda at Chichemecas.

We were accompanied by the administrator and Don Carlos. The señora and the two girls we had seen in the afternoon, already were there. They were introduced by the administrator as his wife and daughters. The young Señor de Leon entered, and we sat down to eat.

The meal consisted of soup, eggs, rice, potatoes, steak, cold sliced tomatoes, avacados, white rolls, tortillas and, the final course, frijoles cooked into a thick, brown paste. A mozo waited table and kept every slender goblet brimming with fresh milk.

After dinner we remained at the table with the men, for coffee, cigarettes and conversation. The coffee was served in extract form, and a decanter of the syrupy, brown liquid remained on the table throughout the meal. It was drunk by placing a few drops in a cup of boiling hot milk.

Our room for the night overlooked the portico, and we were awakened early by the throb of the gasoline motor on the corn sheller.

We ate the *desayuno* of sweet rolls and coffee, with

the majordomo, a foreman of the vaqueros and Señor de Leon. After breakfast we strolled lazily out into the crisp, morning air.

The Indians already were astir. The brown, panther men were trotting back and forth, from thresher to granary, with their burdens of golden corn. A slender, half-nude youth, with a freshly dressed lamb across one bare, bronze shoulder, ran by us and entered the patio. The clash of metal sounded from the tool shed, and the creak of saddle leather from the stable. A gaunt mule was drooping at a hitching post, awaiting the rider who would go to Querétaro for the mail. Women and children passed in and out of the tienda, bearing bundles.

We walked through the open gates and up to the edge of the great artificial lake that furnished the ranch with water. A cold wind was blowing across it, and we stood with the lash of it in our faces, driving out lethargy, bearing vigor and enthusiasm that crinkled like newly-printed greenbacks.

We returned to the casa grande, and the thumping motor of the corn sheller sang in our ears. Don Carlos left his work with another, and went with us to almuerzo, the second breakfast.

The entire family had assembled for this meal, and the table was covered with food. A whole lamb, roasted to a deep brown, formed the center piece. Around it were fried potatoes, fresh tomatoes, rice, melon, chili, white bread and toasted tortillas, coffee, milk and large dishes of the brick-colored frijoles.

Our horses, saddled and bridled, were waiting under

the portico. We said farewell to our friends, shook hands again with Don Carlos and rode away.

The spacious storehouses of Chichemecas were filled to overflowing, but strong, brown feet still pounded across the ancient stones, and strong, brown backs were bent in servitude. The *pam pam* of the gasoline motor sounded in our ears long after the hacienda had faded in the distance.

*We Failed to Reach San Juan del Río
The Day We Left Chichemecas.*

CHAPTER XXX

WE FAILED to reach San Juan del Río the day we left Chichemecas. Intermittent barrages of rain and the illusive distances of the cattle country played havoc with our plans.

An ancient, cactus-grown lane, between stone walls that climbed mountains and dropped fearlessly into crevasses but deviated not an inch from the surveyor's line, led us to the Rancho La Griega, and the storm drove us into the tienda for our noon lunch.

The region of great stock ranches was behind. Before us lay forests, and valleys dedicated to intensive agriculture. A graveled road, in the midst of wide corn fields, drifted away from La Griega. A low, flat-bottomed aqueduct made of red bricks and concrete, like an endless and elaborate watering trough, followed the highway. We, too, turned into the man-made trail, and shod feet beat soothing rhythms on its hard-packed surface.

The shoulder of a hill gave vantage over a panorama of flourishing crops and fluttering groves, glistening with dampness. Half hidden among the trees, and separated by the carefully cultivated fields, stood the white walls and red, tiled roofs of haciendas. Across the graveled path, in the distance, were stretched two parallel

threads of steel and, farther on, still two more. The railroads were converging on the capital. All railroads lead to the metropolis of the Conqueror, and we were entering the republic's zone of greatest population. Our goal was less than five days' travel to the south.

Rain, and approaching dark, drove us into an hacienda near the second railway. We dismounted and entered the office. A short, heavy, yellow-complexioned man, dressed in faded khaki, was reclining on top of a desk, one leg swinging over the edge, eyes half closed. We remained silent a moment, loath to disturb his seeming meditation. Slowly he turned his gaze upon us. He had the appearance of a broken-spirited domestic animal. He said nothing. Bob shifted uneasily and started to speak. Suddenly, the man emitted a roar of laughter that set the papers rustling on his desk.

The laugh ended as suddenly as it had begun. The man slid from his perch and walked toward us, a hospitable smile on his face. "*Buenas tardes, señores.* Is there anything I can do for you?"

"We are looking for a place to spend the night," Bob answered. "We were afraid we would not be able to reach San Juan tonight. Are you in charge here?"

"*Sí, señor.* I am in charge. But I have been in this hole four days, now. If you know someone who will relieve me . . ." Again the room shook with his laughter.

He looked at his watch. "Excuse me, señores, I must make a telephone call." He walked to a wall 'phone, stood on tiptoe to reach the mouthpiece, and gave the bell a vigorous twist. "I wish to call Querétaro," he said into the instrument, in a loud voice. "*Sí,* Querétaro.

What number? *Tres, cuatro, cincuenta y ocho.* No, no, señorita." He almost was screaming. "*Cincuenta. Sí, sí, cincuenta—c-i-n-c-u-e-n-t-a.* *Cincuenta y ocho.*"

Bob turned to me, a grin tugging at the corners of his mouth. "I am afraid this gentleman has lost some of his marbles."

The little ranchero was dancing up and down in front of the instrument, shouting, "*halo, halo, halo,*" every breath. He gave the bell another savage twist and hung up the receiver. He faced us, and this time his explosive laugh was less of a shock. He pointed to the telephone. "Someday I tear that *hijo de chinga'o* off the wall and make splinters of it. Four days I try to call my wife in Querétaro, and always it is the same, 'they do not answer, señor'." He spat in a corner.

"If you don't mind . . ." Bob started.

"But certainly, señores. You seek a place for the night. Welcome to your house. Ha, ha, ha." He went to the door and called a boy to care for the horses.

"Sit down, sit down." He flopped across a chair. His mop of black hair bobbed up and down; his hands beat the air before him like propeller blades. "This place will drive me mad, my friends. The government sends me here to make the farm show a profit. There is nothing to make profit on. My wife, she is in Querétaro. For four days I have not seen her. This is no place for a woman. This is no place for anybody." His flailing arms ceased a moment as he bellowed with seeming great mirth.

An old Indian shuffled in at the door, his hat in his hands. "Do you wish your supper, *jefe?*"

"Of course I wish my supper, you old *cabron*. And

my friends, too, they wish supper. Get out of here," he shouted, and the old man ran from the office.

A slender, brown girl waited on the table. She was cursed thoroughly after every course, and each oath was followed by a roar of laughter from the master.

Bob and I ate in silence. I flinched inwardly every time the servant girl came in to receive her lashing of profanity and condemnation.

I dipped my spoon gingerly into a sauce made of ground chili peppers, and placed a speck of the relish upon an egg in my plate. The ranchero stared at me until I lowered my gaze. Then he chortled so loudly that the dishes clattered a protest. The blood ran to my face. I looked down at my food. "See, see this," shouted the ranchero, and he ladled up the fiery sauce with a tortilla, and filled his mouth so full he had difficulty chewing. "Are you a cat that you must nibble at such food?" Again the dishes clattered in protest.

We returned to the office and listened to the half-insane chatter of our host. Lamps were brought in. "I must make a round of inspection," he said. "There is nothing to inspect, but come along and we shall see what we shall see." I thought if he laughed again, I, too, would be ready for a padded cell.

We passed through empty rooms, empty corrals, empty granaries and empty outbuildings. A gate was found open. The ranchero swore, and laughed as he closed it. "Something might stray in," he explained.

We entered a newly-built tienda, its few, narrow shelves filled with brightly labeled cans and boxes. Candles burned at each end of the counter, and three or

four Indian youths were standing about in the shadows, silently.

The ranchero pointed at a tall, green can, and the storekeeper took it down from the shelves. The ranchero thrust in his hand and drew it out filled with gumdrops. The storekeeper hastened to replace the lid, but the *jefe* thrust him back. "No, no," he shouted. "These are my friends." He indicated that we, too, were to fill our hands with gumdrops. We did. A look of great pain crossed the merchant's face. He stared mournfully at the half-empty can. The ranchero stomped out, his mouth crammed with sweets. Bob slid a handful of copper coins across the counter, and we followed our host.

We slept on a mattress in the center of an otherwise bare room.

The ranchero's laughter awakened us, and we found him in front of the house, supervising the feeding of his livestock: One ox, two cows, a yearling bull of doubtful parentage, two moth-eaten burros and a half dozen wormy sheep. "Look, look," he shouted. "See what my vaqueros have brought in. Is it not an inspiring sight?" He grabbed up a stalk of green corn, with which the animals were being fed, and held it under the nose of the yearling bull. "Eat, my fine fellow, and grow fat." The burros ceased their chewing, and scampered back before his thunderous, "ha, ha, ha."

His laughter echoed about us as we rode away toward San Juan del Rio.

We spent the afternoon and night at a *casa de huéspedes* in the river town. We rode next day through

a region of stone and tile huts, and carefully terraced hillside farms. We slept at a resort hotel in a tiny village surrounding a cluster of hot springs. There were many tall trees overhanging the trail, and traveling, that day, was like a pleasant holiday, after the sun and storms of the treeless places.

We issued forth at dawn. The earth seemed fruitful and good; the people smiled; the forests rustled softly in the morning breeze, and cathedrals thrust their red and white domes through the green leaves.

But the rains came, and again their sabers slashed into our faces and made traveling a trial. Through the sheets of water, across flooded valleys and roaring streams, over roads knee-deep in mud, we rode to Jilotepec, ancient city of the Aztec huntsmen.

*Jilotepec Must Have Changed Greatly
Since the Days of the Montezumas.*

CHAPTER XXXI

JILOTEPEC must have changed greatly since the days of the Montezumas. Legend and history accredit the peoples of the pueblo with having been the greatest hunters among the early Indians. Their tribute to the Aztec emperors consisted of wild game for the royal board; and the Spanish conquerors found the men of Jilotepec with a monopoly on the meat and fur trade in the great market of the capital.

I had expected to find the village one of isolated, individual rusticity, similar, in a sense, to the mountain settlements of the Ozarks in Missouri and the hill communities in eastern Tennessee. It revealed itself, however, as modern, and as lacking in surface distinction, as any of the hundreds of pueblos that surround the City of Mexico. If the town had retained any of its ancient tradition in material form, it was not apparent to the travelers who merely paused for an afternoon and night, and rode away.

I thought, however, that I was able to discern something of the spirit that had produced great hunters, in the natures of the people with whom we came in contact.

We approached Jilotepec along an incomplete highway that the rains had turned into a pitted morass. The horses floundered and plunged about to hold their

footing, and sight of the village offered welcome relief. We met men, women and children scrambling along over the quagmire, going about their tasks as if the day was one of sunshine and warm breezes. The women had drawn their copious skirts close about them and fastened the hems to their waists. Their nude, brown legs plunged bravely into the thick, chocolate colored mud. The breeches of the men were rolled to the crotch. Some of the hardy natives drove loaded burros which might advance only by a series of rearing leaps, their round bellies dragging in the mire. Small children rode the donkeys' backs, the shoulders of the men and the hips of the women. The larger children, bare-limbed, dragged themselves along, laughing and shouting.

Firm footing began where the highway entered between the rows of wood and stone *casitas* that constituted the town. A large, open-front grocery store stood beside an interurban railway line. We dismounted and tied the horses. The hitch-rail was crowded, the streets were filled with people. A carnival was holding forth in the plaza.

We entered the tienda. We were hungry, and we had no silver with which to buy food. We were down to our last financial reserve, a ten-peso traveler's cheque from the bank at Saltillo. We were afraid a small town merchant would not accept the cheque, but hunger has an insistent voice. We selected peanut-butter sandwiches, cheese and fruit. The storekeeper extended his palm. I asked for pen and ink. I bit into one of the sandwiches. Bob did likewise. The cheque was signed, with a casual flourish. The merchant studied it a moment, drew a

handful of silver from his pocket and gave me change for ten pesos. I released my pent-up breath and made myself at home, on top of a sack of corn.

While we ate, we asked the whereabouts of a hotel. We might obtain rooms from the señorita at the *boteca*, the storekeeper said.

The señorita at the *boteca* was a large, money-wise blue-stockinged with a pharmaceutical degree from the University of Mexico. She was the owner of a new hotel, built on the plan of the tourist camps in the United States, she explained. She gave us directions, and said we might have a "cabin" for two pesos the night. There was a stable for the horses, not far away.

We placed our baggage and saddles in the "cabin", arranged for the care of the animals and went forth in the rain to see the town.

In the plaza, an urchin thrust pink circulars in our hands. Two feature pictures, one of them a "talkie," were being presented that evening at the cinema palace, they revealed.

We found the place, under the tall, gray-stuccoed portico of a municipal building. We picked our way through the jumble of sidewalk merchants, to the ticket window. Silver pesos rang on the counter, but the señorita shook her head. "The picture is not over, señores." She pointed to a globe above the door. "When that light flashes the second show is ready to begin." She looked at her watch. "It will be about ten minutes."

We stood with the crowd under the portico. The single narrow door of the theater spewed out its motley audience. The vendors on the sidewalk began shouting

their wares. Barefooted women drew rebozos about their heads and darted from the realm of make-believe into the cold reality of rain at night. Men lighted cigarettes, hunched their shoulders under the brims of sombreros, and shuffled away.

The crowd about us grew thicker. The light above the door flashed and there was a rush to the ticket window. We were drawn into the line by the surge of laughing, growling, ragged Indians; and we were as ragged and as brown as they. A nameless ecstasy sprang from my breast, and laughter rolled over my lips. Bob thumped me in the back; his face was spread in a joyous grin. We stumbled along with the happy mob.

We found ourselves in narrow, wooden-backed seats in a room no wider than the white screen set at one end. Back of us, the operator fussed over his projection machine, while the customers milled about him. Boys whistled and stomped their bare feet. Paper wads flew through the air. A candy salesman added his cry to the din.

A light winked twice, and the audience began to settle down. A mechanical piano wheezed into "Yes, Sir, That's My Baby."

The story of "The Shop Girl's Folly," a picture produced by a French film company, began unreeling on the screen. The subtitles were printed in both French and Spanish.

The crowd roared loudest at a caption which described the villain as a man who "mentally undressed every woman he saw." This caption was illustrated by a scene between the nimble-minded gentleman and the

maid who served his breakfast. The young woman entered the room, fully clothed. Before she could reach the door, to depart, however, her garments appeared to dissolve beneath the lustful stare of her employer. She left the room encumbered only by a pair of long, black stockings and a tray of dishes. The theater rocked with the cheers of the audience.

The talking picture, in the cosmopolitan little play-house of the mountain pueblo of Jilotepec, was a German production titled "The Western Front in 1918." The characters spoke in German, and the Spanish translations were written directly across the bottom of the film, in each scene. The sound instrument was toned down until only a jumble of guttural whispers was audible. The play was similar to the American cinema version of "All's Quiet on the Western Front."

We ran through the mud-filled streets to our "cabin" and went to sleep with the soothing splash of rain on the roof.

We arose in the dark before dawn, routed the stable owner grumbling from his warm couch, obtained breakfast at a *fondita*, explained our business to the policeman on the beat, and turned south for the final, and most eventful day of our march upon the Mexican capital.

*Mexican Bandits
Seem to Function in Epidemics.*

CHAPTER XXXII

MEXICAN bandits seem to function in epidemics. For weeks, months, even years, nothing is heard of them. Then, one day, comes report of a train robbed near Pachucha or Monterrey. The next day a village is sacked somewhere over in Sonora, or a haciendado and his retainers are slain in the state of San Luis Potosí. From these isolated cases the contagion spreads, and robbery, arson, murder and rapine ride on the hoofs of bandits' ponies.

Since the first few days after taking the trail at Villa Acuña, Bob and I had heard only scattered warnings against brigands. And, during the entire thirty-nine days it took our horses to plod the long route to Jilotepec, we had seen no one who threatened us any harm. We had come to feel that the whole thing was a popular myth, that there were no bandits in any of the towns through which we passed.

In fact, we decided, if there were outlaws in any part of the republic, they probably were tame compared to the "tough guys" in the United States. The warnings, we believed, came from persons who only feared the next village contained vicious individuals because the next village was too far away to be familiar; and unfamiliar things are fearful to primitive minds.

Rumors of bandit activities had begun again at San Luis Potosí. There was labor trouble on the railroad in the north. A train was derailed. Nothing had been taken and no one was injured, but shots had been fired at fleeing horsemen.

News travels slowly in the ranch country. At Santo Domingo, Arroyo Zarco and Chichemecas there was no word of *los bandidos*. But the owner of Santo Domingo displayed a muscular forearm which had been torn by a bullet in a raid a few years earlier, and the stucco walls of Chichemecas were as badly pitted as a pock-marked face.

At San Juan del Río and at San Luis de la Paz, tidings had seeped in of sanguinary raids on villages and haciendas in the mountains of eastern Hidalgo. In a cafe at Jilotepec, we heard that one band of brigands had been so brazen as to venture into the very state of Mexico, practically under the noses of the *soldados* posted in all the towns surrounding the Federal District, and the capital.

Myth or no myth, the morning Bob and I left Jilotepec, we voiced our thanks for having been spared an encounter with the lawless. With few exceptions, our associations in the republic had been only the most pleasant. Now, with the ancient stronghold of the Aztecs only seventy kilometers to the south, we felt that danger was past. Already we had run the gauntlet of the wild country.

At any rate, we agreed, we appeared so much like poor, travel-weary natives that robbers would consider us unworthy of their efforts. Bob, with his combined

European and Oriental inheritances, often had been mistaken for a Mexican, and I, being a descendant of the "Black Irish," might pass as a native of Mexico if I were not too closely observed.

The slow trip across the desert and mountain, under a tropical sun, had resulted in our being burned to a similar shade of mahogany brown. Our clothing—blue denim and khaki, boots and broad, straw sombreros—was bleached in spots, muddy in spots and ragged in entirety. Our horses, which had borne us over a thousand miles of the roughest country in the republic, were too emaciated and bedraggled to attract the covetous. Our general appearance had been planned from the very start, as a measure of protection should we wander into the ken of outlaws.

Nevertheless, one of us always carried the pistol given us by Señor Treviño, in a side pocket of his trousers during the day, and under his head at night.

We left Jilotepec on the morning of August fourth. The wet season was entering its final, and most active, half. The river, where we crossed over an ancient bridge at the pueblo's end, was a sucking, swirling flood as thick as flowing lava.

The sheets of water, through which we had trudged the day before, had ceased. But the atmosphere was so saturated it seemed to sweat large, cold drops that somehow found a way under the rubber *capa* draped from my throat, down over the saddle and below my boot tops. Every plant and native hut along the trail appeared to shrug its shoulders and hump over to keep out the dampness.

A road had been started toward the City of Mexico, and Bob and I, heads ducked against the clammy breezes, turned our horses into the yellow quagmire.

For hours we trudged along, climbing over high, muddy ridges, sliding down into wide, muddy valleys, skirting streams that had left their banks,—pushing on in hope of reaching the capital by night.

About the middle of the day we entered a half-flooded valley north of Tepotzotlan. We were damp, hungry and generally uncomfortable. The horses dragged along through soft, black mud that reached to their knees.

Before us, in the distance, was the bare, earthen-stepped hillside that climbs up to Tepotzotlan and Cuautitlan. Behind us, at a greater distance, were the green and slate-colored slopes over which our trail had led from Jilotepec. The entire valley, as far as we could see through the perspiring atmosphere, was uninhabited and deserted.

But suddenly there sounded the echo of a shout, and the far-away flutter of laughter. A long survey of the road ahead revealed a moving patch of color, which, in due time, spread to take the form of horsemen coming toward us. Soon we knew there were four of them and they all carried rifles. Even before we were able to discern their faces under the drooping brims of sombreros, we had decided they were drunk.

We looked for a way to go around them. But the heavy rains had flooded the flat lands on either side of us. Only the newly-building road toward the capital was above water, and it was knee deep in mud.

"I don't like the looks of this," said Bob, and I

agreed. "We had better meet them as calmly as possible, though,—just as if we were old pals. Maybe they will think we are not worth stopping—or maybe they are only going hunting." He laughed nervously. I, too, was making a pretense of taking the entire matter lightly.

I drew the pistol from my pocket and gripped it firmly, concealed by the folds of my rain cape. The four men had drawn nearer. Proximity revealed they, also, carried side arms. When we were within hailing distance, they slowed their horses to a walk. They no longer talked or laughed. We continued at a steady pace, almost fearlessly.

Then they stopped. Three of them were facing us, and the fourth turned his horse crossways of the road. A guitar was suspended about his neck,—above a cartridge belt. He ran his fingers over the strings with studied carelessness.

"Keep going," mumbled Bob, in English. "They're just drunk. They probably will ask for a match or a cigarette." His attempt to maintain his usual Oriental stoicism failed. There was a new huskiness in his voice.

"Maybe so," I answered. "But you be ready to kick that plug of yours out, if we have to make a run for it. In the meantime, start some of that diplomatic chatter of yours. This is one time it ought to be appreciated."

Time and again, Bob's perfect command of Spanish had convinced persons, already deceived by his appearance, that he was a native Mexican. In addition to a faultless use of English, he conversed freely in his mother's native French, his father's Japanese, German, Portuguese and Spanish.

His linguistic ear was so delicately tuned that, as we passed through different states, he was able to alter his own expression and accent to conform to local dialects.

"*Buenas tardes, señores,*" Bob addressed the waiting men. We were less than twenty steps away from them. "*¿Hay mucha agua, no?*"

There was a mumbled "*buenas tardes*" from one of the four. Their hands hovered near their belts. The carbines still were slung over their shoulders. We stopped immediately before them when the one who stood across our path gave no indication of moving to let us pass. Bob talked on, voicing various strained pleasantries concerning the weather.

Three of the men began to edge their horses forward, two on one side of us, one on the other. One of them stopped.

I turned in the saddle, to face the man behind Bob. Bob caught the movement and slid around to watch the man on my right flank. The third man dropped from his horse into the mud of the road.

Pistole became nervous and started twitching. Even the placid Negra had his ears up and was chewing at the bits.

The Mexican standing in the road asked for a match, and stepped toward me. I caught a glimpse of steel in the hand of the brigand behind Bob.

"Kick him out," I screamed, spurring Pistole with both heels, and firing the automatic twice in the face of the man who asked for a match.

Bob, with all his seeming lack of suspicion, was completely alert, and Negra leaped forward with the same

movement that carried Pistole toward the one man blocking our path.

Again I fired twice, this time at the human obstacle before us. His horse reared, fanning with fore feet, and Bob and I scurried past, heads low.

I glanced up, still kicking Pistole, and saw the bandit slash at Bob with a machete. Evidently my last two shots had gone wild. Bob was cursing in French. In that tense moment it seemed ludicrous,—my Japanese companion cursing Mexicans in French—and I laughed, slightly hysterical, as we ran from the bullets that snapped at us and bit into the mud at our horses' feet.

The frightened animals plunged wildly through the deep mire. We were lying flat along their necks, spurring them at every jump. Long after we were safe, we continued running.

When our assailants had stopped their highly inaccurate firing, and our lungs had ceased pumping like Gatling guns, we turned to look back.

Three of the bandits were standing in the road, looking down at a fourth who was lying in the mud.

* * * *

We did not go back to see if he was wounded or dead. We hurried on, forded a swollen stream and climbed across a hill of mud to Tepotzotlan, passing through fertile fields and orchards, peering back like pursued criminals and not pausing until we reached Cuautitlan.

Bob slipped into a *droguería* and bought dressing for a knife wound in his arm, and salve for a bullet burn on my back.

When we were hidden safely, with our horses in the back of a public stable, and exchanging first aid treatment, Bob asked, "when did that shot graze you?"

"I don't know. I didn't feel it at the time. It sure burns like hell, now. When did you get yours?"

"I didn't know I had it until we got away. That bruiser with the machete must have come closer than I thought."

"And look at my raincoat. The entire arm of the thing is ruined."

I held up my own *capa* for inspection. There were two neat round holes high up on the back. "And this is the rainy season," I sputtered, but my anger lacked conviction. "Why, those dirty, greasy, pediculous so-and-sos. Let's go back and clean out the whole blarsted outfit." Laughter sputtered nervously, like drops of rain in an open fire.

*Dark Was Several Hours Old
When We Entered the Wide Paseo de la Reforma.*

CHAPTER XXXIII

DARK was several hours old when we entered the wide Paseo de la Reforma in Mexico, D. F. And the monumental beauties of the historic thoroughfare passed us unnoticed. We had eyes only for one thing,—the Japanese embassy in the Avenida de los Insurgentes.

By telephone from San Luis Potosí we had accepted the invitation of Ken Yanagisawa, Nipponese charge d'affaires, to stop with him. At Cuautitlan, we had 'phoned him to expect us sometime that night.

Our forty days and nights in the wilderness were drawing rapidly to a close.

Since early morning we had pushed forward in a final drive to reach our destination before the day was done. Following our brush with the bandits, we slipped quietly out of Cuautitlan, away from the lurking shadows of local police.

From streets crowded with soldiers, we passed onto the rain-battered *carretera* that leads to the capital. Through mud and water, we rode in silence over hallowed earth.

Across this very valley, perhaps, the ancient Toltecs came, bringing a civilization to the shores of the great Mexican lakes. The invading Chichemecas and Aztecs

also had come out of the north, just as we were coming out of the north. The mire beneath my horse's hoofs was blanketed with legend and I drifted with my head among the clouds.

The fierce Aztecs had remained as conquerors, and, embracing the civilization of the Toltecs, had built a great city. To this city, over the route we were following, had passed the hunters of Jilotepec, bearing meat to the tables of the Montezumas.

But a greater conqueror than the Aztecs had sailed out of the east, and mounted men, with white skin and bearded faces, had ridden northward from the capital, to exploit the mines of each new El Dorado.

In more recent times, barbaric warriors again had marched out of the north. Fierce Yaquis, riding half-wild horses, had swept southward to the metropolis, bearing new rulers to occupy the throne at Chapultepec. Wars and rumors of wars had lashed across the valley, like the coils of a mighty serpent fighting for its life.

The limbs of many of the tall trees between which we were moving, probably had known the ignominy of hempen ropes knotted beneath the ears of dangling human puppets.

Such thoughts drew me back to the clinging mud of the roadway, but their power was momentary in the endless panorama of time. Dreams contained more lasting truths. My head returned to the clouds, and we continued drifting through an extensive amphitheater filled with the ghosts of great conquerors and fallen empires.

South of Lecheria a gleaming, new gash in the hills drew us up to a pavement slab only recently completed and still not open to traffic. A series of canyons and crevasses appeared in the mountain ranges of mist that bore down toward us, and through them, with a suddenness that left me breathless with awe and wonder, there arose, far away across the valley, the two volcanos: Ixtaccihuatl, The Sleeping Woman; and Popocatepetl, home of the god of fire.

They are the symbols, the souls reincarnate of dual-Mexico. The dreamy, soft romance of the reclining feminine figure, blanketed with a coverlet of virgin snow, and the threatening fierce devastation of the silent Mountain of Smoke, are the spirit of the country.

In that brief moment, I felt that I understood the nature of all the hidden undercurrents that shape the destinies of all the peoples of the Mexican republic.

Before my eyes were two vast monuments to the immortality of Creation. Between them and me, but still out of my vision, was a noble city of a million souls. The city represented a civilization which had been founded on a previous civilization which, in turn, was rooted in the ruins of a third great people.

Beneath those timeless mountains, towering fifteen thousand feet above the sea, the noble city was dwarfed to insignificance. A greater power had made the ancient works of man appear builded on the shifting sands.

We paused at the crest of the hill, to snatch greedily at every smallest sight-crumb that sifted through the clouds. There was unusual joy in my heart, and infinite contentment in my soul. If all else might be forgotten,

I felt that the sensations inspired by the first view of Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl, more than compensated for any hardships I had suffered during the thousand-mile trip from Villa Acuña.

The sun was lowering, and we clumped down the hill to the valley floor.

Along the lazy road, sleeping in the shade of tall cypress trees, we rode toward the ancient suburb of Tacuba, where the little army of Hernan Cortez paused to rest after that terrible "Melancholy Night" on which it had been slashed to shreds while retreating from the capital of the Aztecs.

Once we must wait as a herd of sheep drifted across our route. Once we yielded to the temptation of a bunch of bananas hanging before a little tienda.

Dusky, half-naked children played in the road. Burros pattered by. Laughter and music drifted from the door of a *pulqueria*. Tired men were plodding in from the fields to rest in their doorways while the sun still peeped from over the sierra. The quiet, substantial contentment of rural life promised to persist to the very gateway of the metropolis.

But the saw-toothed squawks of modern motor horns destroyed the fabric of tranquillity, at Tacuba. The streets were filled with people, most of them going somewhere in a breathless hurry. The regular afternoon rain arrived, but the dying sun broke through it, and we stopped only long enough to telephone our friend in the city.

Over the route of the dike along which the Conquistadores were driven on *La Noche Triste*, some four hun-

dred and eleven years before, we rode into the capital of the Aztecs.

When we left Tacuba and started across the asphalt strip that traverses the lowlands, the last rays of the day were minting golden coins among the roadside puddles. But blind, sullen darkness crept up beneath us before we reached the city.

We rode into a busy, odorous street that led through a kaleidoscope of gleaming lights, trolley cars and swiftly moving automobiles. A gendarme was standing near a railroad crossing. Dusky crowds of shabbily dressed people swirled about him, flickering in and out of the myriad patches of illumination. But he seemed oblivious of the passing throngs.

"*¿Dónde está la Legación del Japón?*" Bob asked.

"It is near the Colonia Hipódromo, on the other side of the city," answered the gendarme. "It is a long way. You must continue on this street until you come to a large statue of a mounted man." Proudly, "that is King Carlos, Fourth, of Spain.

"At the statue, the Paseo de la Reforma begins. It is a wide avenue of many trees and beautiful monuments. You must continue along the Pasco until you reach the Avenida de los Insurgentes. When you reach that section of the city, inquire again. I think the Japanese Legation is in the Avenida de los Insurgentes."

We thanked him, and rode on amidst the barking of dogs and the laughter of children. People stared at us from the sidewalks. A woman shouted derision from a darkened doorway. A drunk man stumbled from a saloon, waved his sombrero and bowed, almost falling.

For the first time since entering Mexico, I felt self-conscious astride a horse.

Shops and restaurants with steaming foods in their windows, unreeled on each side of us. Tantalizing aromas filled the air. Occasionally we heard music,—soft, sad, romantic, Mexican music.

There were lights and food and music. There was feminine laughter. Cars careened by. We moved on.

Into the bustling, but peaceful, expanse of the Paseo de la Reforma we brought the echo of iron-shod hoofs. But the slow, tired clatter was lost in the vast darkness beneath the whispering trees.

We had covered seventy kilometers since dawn. We had been on the road for forty days, and Villa Acuña was a thousand miles behind us. Only a few squares away, courteous, hospitable, Oriental friends were awaiting us. There would be soft beds and warm baths. There would be good food and good wine. Every day we might lie abed until noon, if we desired.

Tomorrow we would not have to saddle up and ride away from new-found friends.

What would we do tomorrow—mañana—and many tomorrows, I wondered.

Visions of beautiful blonde women appeared in the darkness before me. Their eyes sparkled with laughter. Their shoulders were as white as the snow cape of Ixtacihuatl. Indian women are brown and greasy. Their eyes always are sad. Their hair hangs in limp, black ropes.

Sleek evening gowns, fluffy afternoon frocks and clean, crisp feminine sport dresses floated in fashion re-

view before me. Yet I never remembered having paid particular attention to women's clothing before.

But all these entries in my mental style show were daringly low in the neck, and backs barely existed. And all were filled with apparitions of girl-loveliness, whose lips and arms were only for me. I dreamt of bubbling champagne and dances in the moonlight of a flower-filled patio.

I sought to draw my mind back to material things. But the darkness under the trees was filled with a strange power, and a soothing voice kept repeating in my ears: "You are only twenty. You are only twenty. Dream. Dream. This moment may never return. You are only twenty. Dream. Dream while you are young."

Then I remembered my companion, there in the darkness at my side. And I was ashamed of my former thoughts. Our long days and nights of intimate association had given me ample proof of his culture and intelligence. He was a true citizen of the world. He possessed much of the knowledge of all the peoples of the earth. His travels and his passion for learning had brought him to a mental maturity that I knew I could not claim.

"He, no doubt, is thinking of the history and antiquity of this great city," I said to myself. "He will want to see the remnants of the Aztec and colonial civilizations. He is an intelligent man. I am just a Yankee roughneck with a head too full of frivolous things."

I asked aloud, "Bob, have you made any plans for tomorrow?"

He did not answer.

"There ought to be some pretty swell museums here," I said. "Then we might go out to San Juan Teotihuacan and see the pyramids, and—and," I sought for a scrap of culture among the dreams of silken skirts and perfumed laces, "they say this fellow Diego Rivera is an artist worth knowing. We will have to look up some of his murals."

A growl issued from the darkness at my left. "Rivera, hell." I held my breath. "Listen, Mick, you can chase around looking for museums and art galleries all you like. Tomorrow, I'm going to get pleasantly lit and find me a señorita who's just a wee bit careless with her morals." Tired as I was, I launched a silent chuckle. "And I hope she is a blonde," he concluded.

We rode in silence to the gate of the Legación del Japon in the Avenida de los Insurgentes.

THE END

